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THE
STATE PRISONER

A TALE

OF

THE FRENCH REGENCY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE

STATE PRISONER.

CHAPTER I.

FROM the day of William Clifford's interview with the baronne at her hotel, his feelings, with regard to her, were materially changed. From that time she became an object rather of compassion and interest than of disapprobation and dislike. Of dislike? oh no! It was not in his nature to feel aught but kindness and tenderness towards those who, in distress and grief, allowed him to share in their sorrow. Under other circumstances, indeed, the sensations of deep interest thus excited might have ripened into warmer emotions, but his heart was guarded by love of too fixed, too firm a nature, ever to suffer one thought to stray. He strove to consider the baronne as his sister, and hoped to replace the brother whom she mourned, by

soothing her grief and regulating the impetuosity of her nature. On her part, Mirabel listened to him as to an inspired oracle; every word that fell from his lips was treasured up in her mind; every opinion that he uttered was followed to the letter; her looks, her language, nay, her very reflections, were changed by his example and precepts. In public, it is true, she assumed the mask of gaiety, but here her conversation, though not less brilliant, was more tempered, and her whole appearance, to a discriminating eye, might have displayed a greater regard for those feminine qualities which Clifford had so highly extolled.

In the mean time William's popularity was on the wane, the court ladies pronounced him the coldest and most insensible of a phlegmatic nation; while the regent began to think there was something unaccountable in the young Englishman, whom he had honoured with his especial notice, and with a general invitation to those private banquets from which many of the French nobles were excluded. That a man, on whom nature and fortune had both smiled, should lead so monastic a life, and disregard the advantages which he enjoyed; that he should

make his first and last appearance at one of those suppers, in which Philip of Orleans delighted, and only appear afterwards at the grand and general entertainments, all this awakened the suspicions of the regent. The observations which he had individually made, combined with some secret intelligence, induced him to believe the young foreigner's mind was engrossed by politics and party schemes. To what point they tended, and how far they were to be dreaded, was now a matter of some consideration for his highness.

William's increased intimacy with Mirabel was to him rather a subject of amusement than of jealousy, as he always looked upon her conduct in the same light, and awaited the day when a declaration from Clifford's lips would reward the baronne's perseverance, and afford her the glorious opportunity of delivering up, as usual, her suitor and his proposals to unlimited ridicule. It is true that Mirabel's manner occasionally staggered the duke's judgment of the case; but he only admired her subtlety the more for adapting her demeanour to the rigid notions of a foreigner.

Roland Stanley had not failed to seek his

countryman a short time after the few words that had passed between them ; and Clifford, reflecting that the high road was in fact open to any man, and that he had no proof of Stanley's intention to act the spy, candidly acknowledged that he had spoken hastily, and begged that all might be forgotten.

On the morning of the second masquerade, which took place about a month after the first we have described—having been deferred so long in consequence of the bride elect's indisposition—Roland once more visited Clifford.

His manner was earnest and important, and there was a laboured and mysterious tone in his language that foretold the approach of some weighty intelligence. Having once, however, commenced the subject, he proceeded to acquaint William that he had received letters from the court of England, in every one of which the name of Blanch Courtenay was mentioned in terms of the highest admiration. Here he stopped suddenly, assuming a look of regret, and intending that William should extort an unwilling detail of what was to follow. But Clifford knew his companion too well ; he plainly perceived that Stanley was bending be-

neath the weight of a secret, and was aware that he would gladly and speedily deposit the burden as soon as he found that no assistance was proffered. His acquaintance did not disappoint him: after a long pause, Stanley said that he himself was the last man calculated to be the bearer of unpleasant intelligence, it required so much caution, and prudence, and policy, all of which he had never possessed, yet there were instances in which he conceived silence to be a breach of friendship, and he felt, upon this occasion, that Clifford should be informed of the facts which his English letters announced.

Blanch Courtenay, he said, stood high at court, she had a wonderful influence with royalty, and many courtiers were already disputing the prize; but it was confidently asserted that she was already betrothed to the Earl of Dalmaine, a young man of high birth and large fortune, a friend and constant companion of the king. They were inseparable, and Sir Philip Courtenay himself had informed one of Stanley's correspondents, that the period for their marriage was fixed, although not announced to the world.

Stanley then added, with an air of candour and kindness, that he did wish to inquire into

his countryman's secrets, but it required little penetration to know that such intelligence must be unpleasing to him, although it were better to hear the truth, while there remained a possibility of obviating the evil. Then, with a precipitancy that was not quite worthy of his calculating powers, Roland proposed to Clifford to be the bearer of certain private and confidential letters, which were addressed to some courtiers who were immediately about the royal person, but whose loyalty was most questionable. Working himself up to a pitch of enthusiasm, which he trusted might have due effect upon his companion, this eager Jacobite affirmed that a glorious crisis was at hand, and that it now only required the interposition of a stranger, one to whom no suspicion could be attached, to direct the whole scheme with success. He depicted in flattering terms the requisites of unshrinking courage and fidelity, of noble and steady purpose, of enterprising but judicious conduct; and then turning abruptly to William, exclaimed,

“Tell me, Clifford, will you assist in restoring England her king, and Blanch Courtenay to her lover?”

William heard him in silence, with conflicting emotions. Strong as he was in the belief of

Blanch's constancy, he felt alarmed, now that he saw her day of trial was at hand. He pictured her unhappy and restless ; tormented by the fear of premature discovery, which perhaps led her to listen with apparent complacency to one she could not love. He called up Madame D'Aubry's description of Sir Philip, and dreaded the effect of his anger, which would bruise, though it could not break, the spirit of his daughter. But when Stanley changed the subject ; when the never-failing topic was started, and the proposal made, that he should carry letters to treacherous dependants, and seek the court to which Blanch belonged, as a traitor and a spy, his indignation was roused, and his anger broke forth.

"Never!" he cried ; "you might have known me better, sir ! Had I been willing to break the dying commands of my father, and espouse the interests of an exiled house, I would have dedicated my sword to its service, and have bled for the Stuarts on the field. But to return to my native country, after so long an absence, in the despicable office of a traitor and a spy—to league myself with those vipers who would turn against the hand that now protects them—do you dare to propose such a thing to me ?

Were it not for our long acquaintance ; were it not, Stanley, that I believe you blinded by infatuation, I would call upon you to answer for having believed me capable of such detestable meanness, and for daring to couple the name of one I love better than life, with a proposition replete with disgrace, and unworthy the consideration of a man of honour."

"I thank you, Clifford," replied the other, in a low tone of suppressed resentment; "you are pleased to exercise your powers of language on me, and will, I have no doubt, add cowardice to the list of desirable qualities with which you have invested me: but you are safe from my sword, which has been dedicated to the cause you hold so meanly. But it is time that our acquaintance should be broken off. Since the days we met at Bordeaux, a change has come over all your feelings: your heart is set on other things now, and, as I said before, old friends and new loves do not well together.—Nay, Clifford, I am gone—need I remind you, that in your own house you cannot draw upon an unresisting foe? My life is at this moment valuable to some, though neither to you or to myself; but on my return from Eng-

land, I shall await your commands." He bowed distantly, and left the apartment.

Were we to follow the course of William's reflections upon the varied vexations, anxieties, and apprehensions which the delay of his uncle's letters, combined with many other circumstances, occasioned, we should have little else to relate. Leaving these, therefore, to the reader's imagination, we will accompany him to the masquerade at the palace, where his object was to see and converse with Mirabel, whom he now considered as the only friend he possessed in Paris.

She was, however, in close attendance upon the duchess, who being in an ill humour herself, thought fit to vent it upon her attendants, and seemed to take especial pleasure in detaining the baronne in particular from her anticipated amusement. Mirabel found means, nevertheless, to explain the fact to William, and he accordingly left the presence-chamber, and sauntered through the long range of apartments, with less interruption than on the previous night. He became weary at length, and finding an open window, with a covered balcony that was sheltered from the cold,

he went out to enjoy the aspect of the night. It was mild and clear; the full moon cast a chequered light upon the gardens below, and her pale yellow beams wandered in and out among the evergreens, and traversed many of the serpentine walks, throwing the neighbouring ground into stronger shadow. The sky was cloudless; but of the starry train, one chosen handmaid alone shone brightly, though humbly, by the side of the queen of night.

William gazed for some moments at the heavens, and on looking round, he perceived that he had a companion in his observations. A mask dressed in what was then called the Spanish domino, which consisted of a large cloak and plumed hat, stood by his side, and leaned with him upon the balustrade. They remained together for some time without exchanging a word; and then the new comer addressed William.

“Your meditations are so profound, noble minstrel, that you will scarcely thank me for intruding on them; and yet, as I passed by the open window, and saw so fair a scene without, and the very man I sought standing upon the

balcony, the temptation was too great to withstand, even at the risk of being called unwelcome."

"You sought me?" said William, eyeing the mask as if he would penetrate the black vizard which effectually concealed the wearer's face. "It remains with you to tell me then, on what errand you are bound, and I will forthwith in all candour shape my welcome accordingly."

"I am on a friendly mission," replied the domino; "and though it is my purpose to remain unknown, do not, I pray you, treat the warning I am about to give you as idle."

"Warning!" said Clifford, with a smile. "Now by my faith, good mask, that same word 'warning' is one that I seldom attend to. Caution and I have little sympathy; for he who measures every step he takes, will find the path of life more irksome and rugged than of necessity it is. But think me not uncourteous; that which is well meant will ever be well received by me."

"You English," continued the other, "consider rashness and courage as synonymous terms; but let me inquire if a lodging in the Bastille, or Vincennes, would be palatable to your impetuous disposition, or—"

“Or”—interrupted William, believing that he had now perceived the drift of the stranger’s insinuations; “or whether it would not be better to follow the suggestions of a mutual acquaintance, and fly imaginary dangers to incur certain ones.”

“I do not understand your meaning,” replied the mask; “but as far as imaginary dangers are concerned, a suspicious tyrant, and a treacherous mistress, who are leagued together against you, are enemies not the less to be dreaded because they lie in ambush.”

“The figure of your speech, sir,” rejoined Clifford sternly, “may be apt, but it requires an explanation: the prince whom I suppose you have thought proper to stigmatize as a tyrant, is one to whom I owe some thanks, and no allegiance. But I must request you will assist me to the lady’s name, which you have most unwarrantably coupled with mine.”

The mask laughed provokingly. “You should not judge so slightly of my penetration, Mr. Clifford,” he continued; “there is but one of our French dames on whom you deign to smile; and yet, when I call to mind the philippic I once heard, launched from your lips against the

manners and morals of our good city, it makes me smile to think that you should have installed Mirabel de Bernay in a heart dedicated to the austerity of virtue."

"Comte de Salins!" exclaimed William, "I might have sooner guessed the disinterested friend who wished to provide for my safety, even at the expense of that fair fame which has yet escaped detraction; but I will deal more openly with you,—that man who dares to utter a gross calumny, in my presence, against the Baronne de Bernay, must either retract his words, and own himself a liar and a coward, or maintain the falsehood with his sword, and seal it with his blood!"

As Clifford spoke, he placed his hand upon his weapon, an action that was imitated by the mask, who, however, thus continued:

"In recognising me, Mr. Clifford, you must be sensible that you are speaking with one in whom your sword could inspire no terror, since mine has been measured with the best in the land, and twice with fatal success; but I did not intend that my counsels should lead to altercation, and when you consider the matter calmly the quarrel will appear scarcely justifiable. That

you have more reason than any other person to espouse the baronne's cause is obvious; but the very circumstance that delegates such authority, at the same time precludes the possibility of exercising it too fully. But it is ever thus with the best of us; the errors which our unbiassed judgment condemns are easily palliated when turned to our individual advantage. I am speaking generally, and beg that you will acquit me of all intention to be personal in my remarks."

"You wrong me, M. le Comte," replied Clifford; "but, above all, you foully wrong the Baronne de Bernay, nor can I permit so false a charge to remain unrefuted. The right I claim to stand forward as the champion of your fair countrywoman arises merely from that obligation which binds every man of honour to resent a falsehood coupled with his name, which slander would cast upon a virtuous woman's reputation."

A sound between a laugh and a sneer escaped the domino's lips, who exclaimed,

"You carry the farce too far, sir Englishman; you would not surely enter your asseverations in the lists against my observations, or

gainsay a fact that is as well-known to our good city of Paris as to yourself and me. But if you are willing to exercise your skill in pleading, it would be no unworthy occasion to display your powers, by explaining the mysterious bond which connects you with this paragon, since love has had no voice in the affair."

"The friendship which subsists between myself and the baronne," replied Clifford, who strove to curb his indignation, lest it should tell to Mirabel's disadvantage, "is of that nature which neither of us need blush to own; but allow me to assure you, that, so far from pleading her cause, as you somewhat insolently express yourself, I should consider such a step derogatory to her; nor do I comprehend by what authority you constitute yourself a judge either of her actions or mine."

He paused for a few moments, and then added,

"I wait your pleasure, sir, to know if you intend making me an open apology and retraction of your insinuations, or to follow me and abide by the consequences."

"Forgive me," replied the domino, "if I still doubt your intention of adventuring your

life in so light a cause, or wasting so much enthusiasm on so worthless an object."

"Follow me, sir," said Clifford, "yonder door leads down a staircase into the garden, and there you will easily learn what my intentions are."

He pushed the door aside, and, followed by the domino, descended the stairs hastily, threw his cloak upon the grass, and, drawing his sword, placed himself in an attitude of defiance. His antagonist also unsheathed his weapon, but Clifford dropped his point, on perceiving that the count still retained his mantle, and remonstrated with him in vain.

"No," he replied, "I would not be known, and only request, in case I am wounded, that you will convey me privately from this spot."

"M. de Salins," said Clifford, "replacing his own cloak, "this is no time for ceremony; I entreat you to remember the fearful advantage which my stature gives me over you, particularly at this moment, when your limbs are encumbered with that immense mantle; tell me that you spoke in anger and I will accept your apology, even at the last moment."

"I am not one," replied his companion,

dryly, "to change my opinion of man or woman at the bidding of another."

Here he crossed his sword with that of William, displaying in the single pass that took place, certainly more grace than vigour.

"You are right," cried the mask, "this cloak is unbearable, and even the hat and plume obstruct my view."

Thus saying, the stranger threw off the disguise, and stood before William in the full dress of the duchess's maids of honour.

"Good Heavens!" cried William, "what can this mean, and what has induced you to expose yourself to such danger?"

Mirabel answered him half playfully, half timidly.

"Many reasons," she replied, "first, because to-night, I hardly know why, but I have had an odd feeling come over me, a thirst for amusement, and I wished to prove my proficiency in masking, by conversing with you for a while without detection; and lastly, because—though I almost fear you will blame me—I longed to ascertain how I really stood in your estimation, and if you would consider the cause of Mirabel worthy to be espoused."

“And over and above all,” continued Clifford, “you wished to display your skill in fencing, at the risk of making me a murderer?”

“Oh no,” she replied, “you rate both my courage and my vanity too highly. Had you stood upon the offensive instead of the defensive, the *denouement* would have been more speedy, and the encomium on my fencing lost. You are displeased with me, I fear,” she added; “but nevertheless this incident will be a source of eternal pride and gratification; for, I am convinced, there is not one of those who pour their unheeded protestations daily in my ear, that would resent an attack upon Mirabel de Bernay as nobly as you have done this night.”

Not a little excited by the success of the adventure, the baronne’s countenance assumed that joyous and animated expression which was so familiar to it in former days.

“I feel happier,” she cried, “than I have done for many a day, and am grateful for the feeling, though I know it is to be transient. The duchess detained me so long, for no other earthly purpose than to torment me with her ill-humour, that when her highness did retire, I felt like an uncaged bird; the thought struck

me, in an instant I was equipped *à la Salins*, for whom I intended you to take me, and set out in search of you. But now that we are alone, and out of the hearing of any one, will you redeem your promise relative to your affair with the Duke of P——; I am impressed with an idea that I may be of use in this matter, and it is hardly generous to deprive me of the only opportunity I may ever have of proving my gratitude.”

“Another time,” replied Clifford, “I am not in the mood to talk on such a subject at this moment. I have had so much to vex and thwart me lately, that I am out of conceit with myself, and the world in general.”

“Do not say so,” replied Mirabel, sadly; “or at least do not include me in that world, with which I have now so little sympathy; but it is not for me to hurry that confidence, whose effect I gather from what you once told me, might be to restore you to her you love. Alas! William, I have vowed to further your happiness by every means in my power, but knowing the secrets of my heart, you will forgive the weakness which cannot desire sincerely any event that may hasten an eternal separation.”

“Nay, do not speak in so sad a tone!” exclaimed her companion, as he saw the tear that trembled in the moonlight, “such subjects are painful to us both.”

“What a lovely night!” she broke off suddenly, looking up to the sky. “A night when those who love, send a thousand thoughts and wishes in the direction of the absent. Do you know, William, sometimes I think the stars above us are the homes of the blessed, and that Gaspard looks down upon his sister from the brightest among them. He is my guardian angel now; I am sure he would not suffer any other to possess that office but himself. Oh, William Clifford, William Clifford! he sees us both at this moment; he knows what you have been to me, and he blesses you as I do.”

She turned aside her face for one moment, and then continued:

“But I will not talk of myself, for I know your thoughts are wandering with your heart. Speak to me then of her you love, for I can bear it now; describe her to me; let me know the human being that is worthy of your love?”

“Oh, Mirabel,” replied Clifford, “I feel that it is kind and noble of you to speak in this man-

ner, but do not ask me to dwell upon what she is ; do not ask me to describe her. Nothing that I said could give you an idea of her beauty, her goodness, her disinterested nature, disinterested as your own ; and, believe me, she would appreciate your character—she would love you, Mirabel !”

“ No, no !” exclaimed the other, eagerly, “ she would not, she could not love me, and I—I should hate her ! You do not know how often she occupies my thoughts ; I think of her, and strive to picture her to my mind, but in vain ; sometimes I fancy that my heart expands towards the woman, with whom its dearest feelings are in common, and then again a fearful feeling of hatred takes possession of my mind. Alas ! such violence is no doubt foreign to her gentle nature ; she would shrink from such as me ! What would I give to see her ; perhaps, perhaps, William, I might learn to love her, at least I might admire and emulate her. Have you no portrait, no resemblance, in your possession, to appease my curiosity in some degree ?”

“ Yes,” replied Clifford, “ I have a small, but imperfect copy of a large picture that was painted at Bordeaux, which I always wear.”

"Let me see it! You will not refuse me so simple a request!" exclaimed the baronne, earnestly, "you do not know how my mind is set upon it?"

"The moon is very bright," said Clifford, "but it is a bad moment to judge of the painting."

He took the miniature from his bosom, and gave it to Mirabel, who looked at it for several moments without speaking, while a thousand conflicting emotions rose within her at the sight of Blanch's portrait.

"She is fair," said the baronne at length, with some hesitation; "and her hair seems golden.—Is she tall then?"

"Yes," replied Clifford, "you are right. She is above the ordinary height."

A deep, deep sigh, which forced its way, in spite of her efforts to check its progress, followed these remarks, and then she returned the picture.

"It is beautiful," she said, "most beautiful. They are happy whose countenance can reflect their soul, and vouch for its nobleness."

A pause ensued, painful to both, which was at length broken by William.

"There are people coming down the stair-

case," he cried, hurriedly; "put on your hat and mask, and draw your cloak round you: they have been attracted by the glitter of my sword, which I unfortunately did not sheathe."

"Holy Virgin! what will become of me!" cried Mirabel; "one of them looks like the regent. For pity's sake do not let them discover me."

"Draw your sword, then," said William, "and play the part of Monsieur de Salins boldly, for we may be hardly tried."

The baronne obeyed, but she trembled so violently as to retard her efforts, and she had hardly reassumed the disguise before the regent came up, attended by several courtiers.

"Hold, gentlemen!" he cried; "the first who strikes another blow will have to deal with Philip of Orleans! Is your valour so impetuous as to require a display at the expense of the law, even in our very gardens?—For you, sir Englishman, who will no doubt plead ignorance as an excuse, let me advise you to beware how you again brave the laws of the land in which you live: but your antagonist, at least, can offer no such idle apology—M. le Comte de Salins.—"

“Pardon me, my lord,” interrupted a courtier, “but three hours ago I saw the Comte de Salins stretched on a sick bed, too weak to raise his hand to his mouth.”

“Pasques Dieu !” exclaimed the duke ; “has the count gained a twin brother since yesterday ? or who has stolen his favour, his stature, and his taste for duelling ?”

He advanced towards Mirabel, whose usual presence of mind now forsook her ; and who sheltering herself behind William, addressed one word of earnest supplication in his ear. This movement elicited a general laugh from all but the duke and Clifford. The one was too angry, the other too much alarmed, to join in the mirth.

“My lord,” said William, resolved to interfere between Philip and the baronne at all risks, and addressing him firmly, but respectfully, at the same time covering her retreat to the staircase, “I sincerely crave your pardon for an involuntary breach of decorum ; but at the same time, permit me to remind you, that the code of laws, drawn up by your royal self, to regulate the affairs of masking, is as strict as any other, and to insist upon the discovery of any

mask, contrary to the will of the party concerned, is in direct opposition to that justice which you have ever supported."

As he concluded, he placed himself before the door, and listened anxiously to the sound of the baronne's rapid ascent, while the hope of her escape enabled him to sustain the duke's fury, and the sarcasms of his companions.

"Mr. Clifford has chosen a right formidable adversary, who takes to his heels on the first occasion," said one:—"A very Hercules in size and prowess," rejoined another.

"Gentlemen," exclaimed Clifford, "the presence of his highness alone prevents me from chastising the insolent language, which you would not dare to repeat elsewhere."

"Silence every one of you!" cried the duke, in a voice of thunder; "and do you, sir, lower the style of your language, and stand from before the doorway, that I may myself identify the enemy in whom you take so strange an interest."

Clifford turned to the door, which Mirabel had thrown to, behind her, and while apparently endeavouring to open it, gave the fugitive a few more moments.

But the regent was not easily to be imposed upon. "Your sword, Mr. Clifford!" he exclaimed angrily, as he said that the domino had escaped; "you are at liberty to leave the garden, but will, if you think proper, remain in your own house till you hear further from me."

Clifford deliberately unbuckled his sword, and presented it to the regent in silence; but as he did so, Roland Stanley stepped forward from among the bystanders, and kneeled before Philip. "Suffer me," he said, "to intercede for my countryman, who is unacquainted with the etiquette of courts, and has not resided sufficiently long in Paris to be informed of all the salutary laws with which your highness has provided for its safety."

"Your interference is ill-timed, sir," replied the duke, "you have been a witness to Mr. Clifford's total disregard of the royal authority vested in my person." As he spoke, however, his eye was attracted by the sudden reappearance of the domino at the foot of the stairs; and uttering a tremendous oath, he strode towards the door, bidding any one cross him at their peril. The figure remained motionless until the duke, grasping it rudely by the

arm, dragged, rather than led, it into the open moonlight. There was a breathless pause ; William looked on in horror, firmly believing that Mirabel would prefer death to discovery ; it was impossible to rescue her, and yet as the duke with a brutal violence, that was aggravated by suspicion and jealousy, tore off the disguise, Clifford advanced a step, in the determination of protecting the baronne at any risk ; he stopped, however, in speechless astonishment, which was shared by all around, at the unexpected apparition that met their eyes.

It was a young boy, of a graceful and dignified carriage, who wore a magnificent suit of crimson, embroidered with gold ; his brown hair hung low upon his shoulders, and his large dark eye had an expression of timid archness, which enhanced his native beauty. The duke's unmannerly conduct had called the colour into his cheeks, and there was a mixture of pride and hesitation in his deportment which was in itself captivating.

“ The king ! ” burst at once from every lip, while the duke himself stood uncovered and most of the courtiers bent the knee.

“ This is a strange frolic for your majesty to be engaged in,” observed the regent, in a tone of respectful vexation.

“ True, cousin Philip,” replied the boy, “ the fear of your displeasure prompted me to remain concealed ; but it would be cowardly to allow your anger to fall upon an innocent person, and I stake you my word that Mr. Clifford is as astonished as yourself at this discovery ! At least,” he added, smiling, “ I have afforded you all much diversion— all but my unfortunate preceptor, Fleury, who, without doubt, is at this moment running like one distracted over the corridors. Do you forgive me, dear cousin ?” he added, taking the regent’s hand affectionately ; “ or would you compel the king to sue in vain, before so large an assembly ?”

The duke, who loved the young monarch truly and disinterestedly, kissed the little hand which was extended, and drawing it under his arm, begged him to retire.

“ One moment more, Philip !” exclaimed the boy : and he whispered a few words in the regent’s ear, whose natural goodhumour was restored by the playfulness of the noble child, and by a discovery which relieved his mind from not

a few jealous apprehensions. He smiled, and replied in the same low tone, though these words only were audible :

“ As your majesty pleases.”

The king turned to the group of listeners, with an air of childish consequence, “ Mr. Clifford,” he said, “ the Duke of Orleans, in discovering his kinsman to be the culprit, has, with less regard to justice than usual, waved all punishment ; Here is your sword, the one which I now wear will always be valuable to me, from the recollection of this night.”

“ And mine doubly so !” exclaimed Clifford, taking back his own, from the king’s hand, “ from having been honoured by the touch of Louis the Fifteenth.”

The duke and his royal charge now saluted the bystanders, and ascending the staircase, entered the private apartments.

William stepped forward to thank Stanley for his friendly interposition, but he was met coldly.

“ You are fortunate,” said the other, “ to interest all sexes and ages in your favour ; and I hope, for the sake of those concerned, that no one less discreet than Roland Stanley, ob-

served how, on the mask's reappearance, the cloak trailed upon the ground, or that during his majesty's short absence, he changed the buckles of his shoes. Farewell, Clifford, you have lost a friend where you might have secured one; but for your refusal of my last proposition, I remain your debtor. The man who could so soon forget his plighted vows were but a sorry addition to a cause, which depends wholly upon the constancy of its adherents."

He turned and left the garden, ere William could reply.

Ere we conclude this chapter it may be necessary to give some explanation of the part that the young king had taken in the transaction, which explanation can be conveyed in a few words.

When the baronne reached the top of the staircase, she avoided the public apartments; and, acquainted with the locality of the palace, turned immediately into a small vestibule, which led to the private rooms allotted to the royal family. Her consternation can scarcely be described when she perceived a figure leaning out of the window, as if in the act of listening

to the conversation which had just taken place below. The noise of the door opening attracted his notice, and Mirabel knew not at first whether she ought to derive any consolation from perceiving that it was the young king himself, who, having assisted at the fête, slept for that night beneath the Duke of Orleans's roof.

He turned towards her immediately : " I saw it all ! " he exclaimed, " fly, baronne for your life ; my cousin's fury is not to be braved, and in another moment he will pursue you. "

" Oh, my lord, " said Mirabel, falling on one knee, and tearing the mask from her face, while a sudden hope flashed across her mind ; " you told me the other evening, when we danced together, that you would grant me any request that lay in your power ; do not, for mercy's sake, refuse me now ! "

" What do you mean, madam ? " inquired the boy, half delighted, half alarmed by this appeal to his childish protection : " what good can I possibly do upon this occasion, except by keeping your secret from my cousin ? "

" Put on this disguise, sire, " she replied, " and go down into the garden, that it may

be supposed your majesty was the fugitive ! You have heard all that passed and therefore need no directions how to act."

"But what will the regent say, my dear baronne, if by any means he should discover the truth ?" said the king with some hesitation.

"There is no danger, there is nothing to fear !" cried Mirabel, earnestly.

"Give me the disguise !" exclaimed Louis the Fifteenth, the colour mounting to his cheeks, "I never said I was *afraid* !"

The dress was quickly adjusted, and whispering one word of admonition in his ear, the baronne led her youthful accomplice to the head of the staircase, while, crouched below the balustrade, she heard every word that passed, and only returned home when satisfied that William Clifford was at liberty.

CHAPTER II.

THE journey of life may in some respects resemble a road through a mountainous country, along which we travel on for some time, amid a continuation of the same kind of scenery, till suddenly a new winding of the path brings us upon a landscape entirely dissimilar from that we have just left behind us. Often do a few hours suffice to convey us from accustomed scenes and familiar society, to those which are totally opposite, in appearance, character, and interest, while the unbridled horses of destiny hurry us forward, in spite of regret or remonstrance. Such a change must we now present to any friendly eyes that gaze upon this page; but in the present instance, at least, the reader will be welcomed by an old friend, in the per-

son of Blanch Courtenay. Taking leave of Paris, we must then conduct him, the reader, in the direction of Hampton Court Palace ; a residence, whose comparative seclusion during the absence of George the First, cannot fail to present a striking contrast to the gay and dissipated court of Philip of Orleans.

It may be remembered that we left Blanch on the night of her return to her father's abode, and it will be therefore necessary to go back a few months, for the purpose of continuing the narrative of her personal adventures from that period. The palace was then thinly tenanted, several of its inmates absent at their several estates, and others in active attendance upon the royal person. But Sir Philip Courtenay seldom left Hampton Court, except to pay his respects to the king in London, and thus Blanch for some time saw no one but her parents, a cause of rejoicing to her, though not to them.

Summer was in her pride, and Blanch found much to enjoy in the home allotted to her. Her parents, who vied with each other in complying with her wishes, fitted up her apartments in the style she preferred ; and Sir Philip, who

often inspected with his daughter those parts of the palace which were interesting from historical association, readily acceded to her request of adding one room to her particular suite. It was small and confined, but possessed more charms, in Blanch's sight, than many of its spacious neighbours, on whose antique appearance, bad taste had made many inroads. The walls were painted in fresco, representing the last supper of our Lord, and the illuminated arabesques of the cornice, were elaborate and curious. The story ran, that this small chamber had been appropriated by three widely-opposed personages, who had severally inhabited the palace, Wolsey, Charles the First, and Oliver Cromwell, and it was also positively asserted that the cheshire prophet and court jester Nixon had died of starvation, from having been locked up and forgotten, in that very room. One part of its history alone was sufficient to consecrate the spot in Blanch's eyes. It had served as an oratory to the royal martyr, Charles, a monarch in whose fate her liveliest sympathies had ever been engaged. She did not regard him with the false enthusiasm which leads us to extol even the faults of those in whom we are inte-

rested; but she loved to view him in the latter years of his life, when chastened, though not conquered, by adversity; all the nobler and better qualities of his nature shone brightly amid the gloom of persecution and sorrow. A considerable portion of those days had been passed by Charles as a prisoner in his own palace; and Blanch would picture him to herself kneeling before the little oaken altar, and breathing that spirit of humiliation to his God which he scorned to display before his fellow men. Who could tell, she thought, to what secret prayers that oratory had been witness, what contrition for former errors, what intercession for that family which he loved so tenderly? To consecrate the room more especially to his memory, Blanch caused a small copy of the magnificent equestrian picture by Vandyke, to be placed in the recess. No other painting of any kind was admitted—excepting, indeed, a view of the chapel of St. Estelle, a drawing by William Clifford.

Sir Philip looked upon the taste as trifling, but wishing to conciliate his daughter, was only too happy that her ambition should be so limited, while Lady Courtenay was at a loss to

conceive how Blanch could prefer that dull corner to their spacious drawing-room.

The ancient courts and cloisters of the palace, which spoke so distinctly of days long passed, were to Blanch full of interest; but in the beautiful gardens that were annexed to the building she would pass all her loved hours of thought. Their broad terraces and grass parterres, ornamented, though not overstocked, with statues and fountains, encircled by a boundary of tall lime-trees, and skirted on one side by the river Thames, formed indeed a pleasing retreat, both during the heat of the day, or at the sweet still hour of evening. But Blanch loved to be alone, because solitude was dedicated to William.

At first hope was so high within her that she rejoiced in believing their separation would not prove as insupportable as she at one time supposed. But this bright delusion did not last long, and there were times when the thought that to-day, ay and to-morrow, must pass without the possibility of seeing him; that there was no step to be listened for, no sweet anxiety to be experienced, when the opening of the door foretold the approach of some one — of any

one but him—was almost insupportable. She never heard his name, except when she fondly murmured it in her own hearing, and then looked around half afraid lest any one should be near to catch that well-loved sound. Oh! how long, and how fully did she dwell upon the remembrance of every word and look, returning again and again to her cherished store, until memory could yield no more nourishment, in her heart's famine. She loved the silent communion of her own reflections better than the brightest conversation of others, and although the recollection of the past helped to render the present more gloomy, she would not have parted with one thought connected with happier days. Alas! who would give up the faculty of retrospection, even while they rail against it. The weary and dispirited traveller, compelled to pursue his way amid arid and burning tracts, can still derive consolation from the thought, that the fertile land from whence he came, is yet in sight. There, while the sun pours its scorching rays upon his unprotected head, still with a fond and lingering look, he gazes upon valley, wood, and vineyard, and his aching vision, at least, is refreshed by their distant verdure.

In like manner felt Blanch ; but while dwelling upon the past, and dreaming of the future, she endeavoured to render the present as tranquil as she could. Grateful to her parents, she strove to regard them both with love, but she found with regret that they were neither of them what she had been fond enough to fancy. Her mother's character in some degree resembled that of Madame D'Aubry, but the latter was at least a rational, if not an agreeable companion, and Lady Courtenay appeared to have no fixed idea of her own, on any subject whatsoever. The marked difference of Sir Philip's demeanour towards his wife and daughter, too, was most distressing to the latter, for it gave her no pleasure to see the opinions of her mother openly slighted, while her own were, comparatively speaking, esteemed.

All was calm, however, and thus the days passed, without any incident to break their monotony, until one morning, when Blanch was sitting alone, the female attendant, whom Madame D'Aubry had placed in her service, entered the room, and, with divers apologies and lamentations over her own negligence, she proceeded to tell her mistress, that on the eve of

their departure from Bordeaux, a parcel had been intrusted to her care. She did not know whence it came, but there were strict orders not to deliver it until they arrived in England; and the penitent waiting-woman confessed that she had forgotten the circumstance until that morning.

"I was told, madam," she said, "that the court was expected soon, and so I thought you might want the brocade dresses, and among them, where I had put it for safety, I found the box."

Blanch easily forgave her, and waited impatiently until the door closed to examine the contents of the packet. It scarcely needed the well-known writing to tell her that it came from William. She opened it as hastily as the careful sealing would allow, and found a small note, directed to herself. For a few moments the writing appeared illegible, the letters danced before her eyes, and her heart beat as if the writer stood in her presence.

"Could you but know, my Blanch," the note began, "the value I have ever set upon the accompanying miniature, you would accept as a strong proof of my affection a gift, which

may perhaps appear trifling. It has hitherto been my dearest possession, and yet you will smile when I tell you, it is the portrait of a mother, who died so early that her beautiful face, and sweet voice are the only traces of her which remain imprinted on my memory. She bequeathed the portrait to me as her only child; my father had never seen it, during her lifetime, but after her death, he would sit and look at it, till the tears ran down his cheeks; and yet, I have heard, she only repaid his devotion by a cold fulfilment of her domestic duties. On me she doted, and to leave me she grieved; even now I have a faint recollection of her melancholy caresses, when dying. Perhaps it is the tenour of my own feelings at this moment, with regard to yourself, that induces me to believe the picture was originally designed by my mother for some object of an early attachment. But the date, which is previous to her acquaintance with my father, and the inscription (quoted from some favourite old French authors) justify the supposition. Wear it often and value it highly for the sake of William!"

With a hand trembling with agitation,

Blanch lifted the picture. It was that of a young and extremely handsome woman, whose features and expression she would have considered too masculine, had not this very circumstance rendered the resemblance to William more palpable. She perceived at once his intention of presenting her with a memorial of himself, which might be worn without exciting any suspicion in others; and from her very heart she thanked him.

The portrait was set with diamonds, and on the back was inscribed, "*Marguerite au sien amy doulce, mande*"; and a little lower, "*Mieux en ton cuer, cent fois descript.*"

She was still gazing on it, when she was surprised by her father, who entered gently. Sir Philip was himself startled by his daughter's occupation, and bent anxiously over her shoulder to inspect the miniature.

"Why, my dear Blanch," he said, laughing, "that blush, and that start, quite deceived me; I expected to find some fierce-looking cuirassier, or dapper Bordellois, with a view of his vineyards in the back-ground, to remind you of himself and his possessions, at the same time, and lo, it is but the resemblance of some deter-

mined-looking damsel, to whom you are bound no doubt by the indissoluble ties of female friendship."

"Oh, no," replied Blanch, smiling, though scarcely at ease, so ill-timed had been her father's entrance; "I have never seen the original of this portrait: she was the mother of a friend of mine."

There was a pause; and Blanch dreaded lest the next question should relate to that friend.

"She was one," continued Sir Philip, "I should have been sorry to deal with. Most women have a way of their own; but hers was no trifling will, depend on it. I did not, however, intrude into your sanctuary, dedicated to the memory of deceased sovereignty, and existing friendships, without a cause. I came to tell you, that the dull and uninteresting life you have lately led, is happily at an end for some time: his gracious majesty arrives to-morrow, and has signified his intention of passing several months between Hampton Court and London, so that part of the court will remain here, even when he is absent for a week or two. You do not look so pleased as I

fancied you would ; but depend upon it, Blanch, you will find the difference agreeable, after being shut up here like a cloistered nun, with your father and mother, for confessor and abbess. Trust me, I know enough of youth to be certain that a splendid ball-room will appear more charming than our dull fireside ; and that you will find it a pleasanter occupation to listen to the sweet speeches of the gay young courtiers, than to sit in this dark room with your eyes fixed upon the portrait of friendship once removed.—Nay, I did not mean to hurt you, dear Blanch,” he continued ; “but this news has raised my spirits. I wish that blush could last until our royal master saw you, or that you would promise to get up another like it, for the occasion.”

“You are laughing at me, my dear father,” answered Blanch, striving to conceal her emotion : “I have no doubt I shall appear most awkward in the royal presence ; being totally ignorant of all form and customs, I must trust to my mother, and yourself for instructions on that head.”

“Not in the least : your ignorance will delight his majesty ; and you have only to repeat

the graceful courtesy you threw away the other day in the garden, on some humble individual, and I will answer for its effect. But I have many preparations to make, and so have you : let me entreat you to be most attentive to your appearance. Lady Courtenay will, I have no doubt, lend you some of the family jewels—there are enough for both of you. Your mother and I must receive the royal party at the gates, but I think it will be better to defer your presentation until the evening.”

So saying, and with his head running on a thousand speculations, which fortunately for his daughter's peace were not divulged, Sir Philip Courtenay left the room.

Blanch turned once more to an earnest examination of the picture, while the thoughts of flattery and admiration, which her father had striven to awaken, were cast from her ere he left the room. Yet at this moment she regretted more than ever the necessity of concealment. She felt that it would be a sad trial to mix in society, and be considered as one at liberty to listen to any suit, when she was in fact the promised wife of another. But that was nothing compared to the sor-

row of living beneath her father's roof, receiving daily proofs of kindness, and yet allowing her parents to remain in ignorance of her engagement. It appeared to her an act of passive duplicity, and though they had never inquired, directly or indirectly, if she had formed any attachment, she felt that should they do so, she could hide the fact no longer. In the mean time, she resolved to conform in every possible way to their will, and to show them every possible duty and attention.

The eventful day of the king's arrival at last came, and was hailed by Sir Philip with joy. Towards the afternoon every thing was prepared, and the zealous courtier, awaiting the return of some messengers, who were stationed on the road to give him timely notice, was in all the bustle of excitement. At last the signal was given, and hurrying Lady Courtenay across the courts, they received the king at the principal gate, where, contrary to custom, he alighted. Blanch stood at the open window, with no little curiosity, and at last perceived her father emerge from the archway, while on his arm there leaned a middle-aged man, dressed in a plain suit of brown cloth. The exultation of Sir Philip's

step, first led her to believe it was the king who accompanied him, for George the First displayed but little dignity either in his appearance or manner. Immediately behind followed two ladies, whose personal charms, at least, did not appear to Blanch to account for the attention which was paid them by several courtiers. Innumerable gentlemen, officers, and pages followed, some of whom, having at length caught a glimpse of Blanch's fair face at the window, looked up, and directed their neighbour's attention thither, which caused her to withdraw hastily from the casement.

CHAPTER III.

BLANCH had many minor causes for uneasiness besides that great one which pressed continually on her mind. The very anxiety which her parents expressed regarding her first appearance at court was in itself distressing to her. Lady Courtenay, indeed, by her continual suggestions and alterations of the dress which her daughter had selected for the evening of her presentation, would have wearied the patience of any less forbearing disposition ; while Sir Philip, who could not stoop to the minutiae on which his wife enlarged, watched eagerly the opening of the door that led to Blanch's dressing-room. She came at last, and feeling sure that she would be an object of scrutiny to her father, endeavoured to conceal the slight em-

barrassment she felt, by inquiring, playfully, if he considered her fit to accompany him.

Sir Philip expressed himself perfectly satisfied; and indeed it would have been difficult to have found any fault with the fair creature before him.

Lady Courtenay had endeavoured to persuade her daughter to powder her beautiful hair; to drag it up by the roots, and disfigure herself according to the exaggerated fashion of the day. But Blanch entreated her permission to continue the same style of dress she had always worn at Bordeaux, which more nearly resembled the graceful and becoming costume of Louis the Fourteenth's time. No sooner did Sir Philip praise his daughter's dress, than Lady Courtenay became convinced of its beauty, and begged that Blanch would always continue it: then looking at her husband and child with mingled feelings of pride and pleasure, this strange compound of affection and weakness insisted upon Blanch's taking Sir Philip's arm, while she followed them through the long gallery that connected their rooms with the state apartments.

Blanch's heart beat fast, and her colour went and came; but her father's conception of the

cause was not the true one. It was the first time she had been in public since her arrival, and she felt as William had felt in Paris on a similar occasion. Her sensations, however, had with them more of apprehension, more of embarrassment, as passing through the corridors by the side of Sir Philip, she felt that the hour of trial might be drawing nearer, and more near.

Entering the presence-chamber suddenly, Blanch found herself in the midst of a scene of splendour which far surpassed any thing she had ever seen before, and in a crowd of utter strangers, and she clung still closer to her father's arm. Sir Philip whispered a few words to the lord chamberlain, and then turning in a hurried manner to his daughter, informed her that he had sent to solicit his majesty's permission to present her. On the chamberlain's return, Blanch followed him between her parents, and the king receiving her graciously, ventured a compliment in broken English, and kissed her upon both cheeks. Sir Philip looked anxiously round the room, and read in several countenances the admiration which he so much coveted for his daughter ; but he was moreover charmed with an audible panegyric upon her beauty, from

his majesty, which, to Blanch's peculiar notions, would have been better pronounced out of her hearing.

"My dear Philip," exclaimed Lady Courtenay, when the ceremony was concluded, "the Princess of Wales is in the next room : should we not present Blanch to her also ?"

"As you please," he replied carelessly; "you can do that yourself while I remain here, for her royal highness and I were never the best friends in the world."

Lady Courtenay led the way, and Blanch was much pleased with the kind though dignified reception that she met with from the princess, who was but too often neglected in a court whose monarch himself bore her no good will, on account of the differences which existed between himself and his son. By her side stood a beautiful girl, the lively and admired Miss Bellenden, whose respectful but sincere affection made up in a great measure for the cold civility of George the First's courtiers.

Lady Courtenay took a particular delight in making her daughter known to all her own friends and acquaintance, but after one or two general and uninteresting remarks, Blanch inva-

riably found herself abandoned to her own reflections.

There must surely be some ingredient in our national character which is inimical to forming new connexions; something that recoils from entering into conversation even with that very person whose acquaintance has been voluntarily made. To what else can we attribute the strange phenomenon of two human beings who express a mutual wish to become known to each other, and then, having uttered one sentence apiece, relapse into a silence which is irksome to both, but which neither thinks proper to break? It is not to be supposed that they can have many ideas in common; but some at least we all have; and there are many degrees between the dulness of unelicited and unconnected remarks, and the interchange of every thought and feeling. Blanch, in consequence, found herself lonely; and although few passed her without some tacit or audible expression of admiration, there were none who of themselves appeared to court or covet her acquaintance. Nor had she any reason to wish for theirs in particular; but as she looked round at the groups of people who appeared all to have some

topic on which to speak, some joke to renew, some point to discuss—when she saw the smile of salutation, the extended hand, and the friendly look, Blanch felt very lonely. She thought of the different manner in which a stranger was received at Bordeaux, and she gave way to the fatal error of comparison. It was so new to her to be neglected, to be forgotten, that the novelty of the circumstance made it appear more bitter. And yet she endeavoured to console herself with thinking, that if she were allowed thus to pass unnoticed, her situation in the end might, under her peculiar circumstances, be one of less difficulty. She did not understand the springs which regulated the machinery of that society in which she now appeared ; she did not know that even the opinion of some depended on the decision of a few ; that there were several at this very moment who were waiting anxiously, until the decree of those few had gone forth, to know if they might perceive her beauty, and cultivate her acquaintance.

Sir Philip, although he remained chiefly near the royal person, watched every movement of his daughter, and began to feel somewhat uneasy at the comparatively small effect which she pro-

duced. But he understood the cause right well, and was much relieved when Lord Dalmaine stepped forward and expressed his wish to be made known to Miss Courtenay. "Upon my word, Sir Philip," said he, "I have just been voting the thanks of the court to you, for having provided us with such a beautiful addition, on our return. Heaven knows, youth and beauty are scarce articles with us at present."

"I hope, my lord," replied Sir Philip, laughing, "you will not poison my daughter's unsophisticated ear, by such courtly speeches as these. You will have some compassion, I trust, upon her head, if you have none upon her heart."

Thus saying, he traversed the room, and having introduced his companion to Blanch, left them together, and returned to his post. Lord Dalmaine, however, claimed a prior acquaintance, from having seen Miss Courtenay at the window, and she had no difficulty in recognising one of the courtiers whom she had perceived crossing the quadrangle. He was a shrewd and clever man, and having been much struck by Blanch's whole appear-

ance, proceeded to converse in such a manner, as he thought would in all probability enlighten him as to her character and disposition. Under similar circumstances, the conversation of a woman is important, and one accustomed to the world would guard it, without allowing it to appear that she did so. Blanch perceived that the curiosity of her companion was excited, but her unostentatious modesty and tempered liveliness ensured his respect, while it increased his preconceived admiration. They talked on many subjects, and Blanch was sorry when they were interrupted by frequent requests to be presented to her. She did not hesitate to express her surprise at this sudden tide of popularity, to her newly-gained friend; but he smiled significantly and gave her no other explanation. He amused Blanch, however, by describing all the people present, and insisted in the course of the evening on making her known to Miss Bellenden, whom he affirmed was one of the only people that ever uttered a word of common sense in his hearing. When they parted, he expressed a hope that he might often have the pleasure of seeing her during the time the king remained at Hampton Court.

But it was not until Lady Courtenay congratulated her daughter, in precise terms, on having touched the hard heart of Lord Dalmaine, that Blanch trembled at the bare idea of such a possibility, and determined for the future to be even more careful and more reserved.

As we shall have frequent occasion to mention this nobleman's name in the course of the narrative, it will be necessary to make the reader more fully acquainted with him, which can only be done by referring to his previous history. He succeeded to the title, and found himself in the possession of a large fortune, and entirely his own master at an early age. Following the wild inclinations of youth, and both the bad counsels and bad examples of his friends, he plunged at once into extravagance and dissipation, and to his astonishment found, that both his fortune and his health were rapidly declining. Prompt and decided in all his measures, he sold his house in London, shut up the one he possessed in the country, and set forth upon his travels.

He remained several years abroad, during which time he saved sufficient money to enable him to live at ease on his own property when he

returned. The plan of life he had followed during his tour was completely at variance with his former pursuits. Possessing natural talents, with keen powers of enjoyment for all that was beautiful in art and nature, he now improved his mind by the study of the one, and his heart by the contemplation of the other. Thrown frequently upon himself for amusement, he found that he had hitherto considered his own intellect too meanly, and he derived a pure delight from cultivating those natural qualities with which he had been endowed.

He learned also to place his own estimate on persons and things, and to value them for their own merits; and disgusted with the ordeal through which he had passed, he loved to discover, and knew how to appreciate the freshness and freedom of a young uncontaminated mind. To him the world had proved indeed a purifying furnace, divesting the nobler ingredients of his character of the dross which once clung to them. But the experiment is a dangerous one, for, in minds of a weaker cast and less powers of resistance, the better qualities are but too often consumed the first, or the whole reduced to a heap of unprofitable ashes. Whilst

abroad, Lord Dalmaine had formed an attachment to a lady of singular beauty; but her levity and deceit were said to have prejudiced him against her sex in general, for, from the day he parted with her in anger, he had never been known to address any woman seriously, although his manner was remarked for a degree of courtesy approaching to gallantry. He was a great favourite with the king, who gave him an office of distinction in the household, and he was consequently courted and flattered by Sir Philip. The baronet, indeed, no sooner heard Lord Dalmaine's opinions of Blanch's beauty than he determined to leave no means untried to secure the young nobleman as his son-in-law. Could he have seen into the depths of Dalmaine's heart, he would have been even more elated, for something nearly resembling love was already kindled there, with a rapidity that was in keeping with a character the failing of which always had been a fondness for extremes.

CHAPTER IV.

BLANCH was not slow in discovering that her speedy marriage was the object of Sir Philip's ambition, and the vigilance with which he watched her every look and movement, when in public, distressed her extremely. Her easy natural manner became constrained, and at times abrupt, from a dread of exciting that admiration which is so often sought after by those of her age and sex. To Lord Dalmaine, in particular, the change which took place was one of profound mystery and real interest. The evening of their first acquaintance had convinced him that Blanch possessed no ordinary powers of mind, and, moreover, that she found pleasure in conversing with one who could understand and participate in the opinions she expressed.

But on their next meeting, she appeared a different person, and although she greeted him kindly, there was something distant and uncommunicative in her whole deportment. Lord Dalmaine was surprised, but not discouraged, by this alteration, surprised only because he conceived, from Blanch's conversation, that she would rise superior to the caprices which he considered natural to women in general. Yet, even when she did interrupt herself in the midst of a discourse that was becoming animated, or relapse suddenly into silence without any apparent cause, he found her very waywardness preferable to the commonplace demeanour of others. He invariably courted her society, but, believing that she was not likely to understand or value an attachment that was formed so suddenly, he restrained his natural impetuosity, confined himself to general topics, and was contented for the present with paying her such attentions as she could not refuse to accept without proving that she considered them seriously.

Lady Courtenay could not conceal the pride which she felt at Lord Dalmaine's preference; her only alarm was lest Blanch's inexperienced

heart should fall too easy a prey, before her admirer had made up his mind on the subject. It never entered into her head that so young a woman could be made the object of a handsome young courtier's attentions, for any number of days together, without falling desperately in love, as she was fond of expressing herself. But Sir Philip's meditations on the subject were, as usual, more profound, and his anxiety deeper ; he loaded Lord Dalmaine with civility, and made him a partner in all their domestic schemes of amusement : a system which was understood and despised by the young nobleman, even while he gladly availed himself of the opportunity of cultivating Blanch's acquaintance. She, in the mean time, would have been happy to seek solace in the rational intercourse of thought, which she now seldom enjoyed ; but, as we have before remarked, she always dreaded entering on any subject that might produce an understanding of sympathy between them.

In the mean time the king, after passing some months at the palace, returned to London for a short time ; and, to the surprise of some, Lord Dalmaine still lingered at Hampton Court.

It happened one evening that Blanch, accompanied by her father and mother, was walking in the gardens, about sunset, when they were joined by the young nobleman. Sir Philip at that moment felt an unaccountable anxiety to show Lady Courtenay, who hung on his arm, a very peculiar flower which he had remarked the day before, and they accordingly quickened their pace, leaving their daughter to converse with Lord Dalmaine.

Blanch had passed a sad day, counting the hours since she had heard of William, and foreseeing some of the trials that were in store for her. She had come to the sad conclusion, that neither of her parents could inspire her with confidence on any point. In their society she felt solitary and alone; and then her heart flew back to the recollection of him she loved; but, while she mourned in spirit, she was forced to deny herself the sweet solace of tears. In this mood Blanch had gladly acceded to her father's proposal of walking out to watch the sun set over the river; for although the voice of nature could not dispel her melancholy, it softened and subdued it. At such a moment the accents of kindness, which resembled in no way

the guarded expressions of her father, or the insipid conversation of her mother, fell pleasantly on Blanch's ear, and she listened to her companion's remarks on the scene before them with satisfaction.

The western sky was one sheet of liquid gold, casting a beautiful light down the river, and on numerous little boats which now dotted the water. From this side the palace presented a truly picturesque appearance, with numerous ornamented towers, small domes, and high stacks of chimneys curiously twisted and interlaced which, partially gilded by the rays of the setting sun, had something Moorish in their character. Against the brilliant sky rose the favourite bower of good Queen Mary, while the melancholy yew and dark green holly stood out in proud relief, from their glorious background.

Blanch and Lord Dalmaine leaned together on the iron balustrade that overhangs the river, and watched the changes of nature's lovely countenance, while a faint blush played round the horizon, and gradually settling into a rich warm glow, spread itself rapidly over the heavens.

“How sincerely,” exclaimed Lord Dalmaine, breaking a silence that was beginning to be painful, “do I pity those who are insensible to the pleasures of such a scene as this ! How incomprehensible does it appear to me that any one can look with indifference upon the varied pages of the book of Nature !”

“I do not think there are many,” replied Blanch, “who regard any thing decidedly beautiful with an eye of utter indifference ; but I am sure there are few, very few, who possess in its full extent the power of appreciating the calm but exquisite pleasures to which you allude.”

“I believe it to be a gift,” said Lord Dalmaine, “a precious gift, for the possession of which we should be deeply grateful.”

“Oh yes,” rejoined Blanch, “such a capability of enjoyment gives a wider range to existence, increases the means of happiness, and is in itself a blessing and a balm, requiring, I should conceive, a refined as well as a pure mind.”

“Do you think, then,” inquired her companion, not a little interested by the discussion, “that such feelings proceed altogether from the exercise of the intellect ?”

“Certainly not altogether,” she replied ; “the delight with which we are enabled to gaze on such a sky as this, or to examine the minuter Iperfections of a flower, appears to me a mingled exercise of brain and heart. Consequently it is more profound than that experienced by such as regard the same objects with the eye of scientific admiration only. Thus the artist may discuss the merits of the colouring, and the florist descant on the peculiarities of the plant, without deriving half that pleasure which has its source in feeling, and, in many instances, borders on emotion.”

“You are right,” rejoined Dalmaine, who listened with unfeigned attention ; “and your explanation of the cause which expands the sense of enjoyment is in my opinion perfectly correct. This is perhaps the reason why women, generally speaking, are more enthusiastic admirers of nature than ourselves. They are never contented with any feeling from which the heart is excluded ; and yet it would be difficult to define that link, which often connects the most dissimilar objects. Why should the page of nature, when it is one we peruse for the first time, refer us to the volume of our affec-

tions? Why should music, beautiful but unfamiliar, hurry us back to the recollection of those we love? Had two people loving each other, looked upon the same scene, or listened to melody side by side, no interpretation would be needed of the feelings of each when they look, or listen, alone. Why, for instance, should the act of gazing on such a scene as this, call up in an instant every form we love? Unless, indeed, the light which emanates from the face of nature pours at once into the brain and the heart, illuminating in the one all its host of thought and imagination, and like an electric flash, displaying all those bright images with which affection and memory have adorned the innermost recesses of the other."

"It may be so," replied his companion seriously; "but to me there is something in the very name of evening that appears devoted to reflection, and consecrated to every kindly and better feeling of our nature."

As she pronounced these words, Blanch felt uneasy at the confidential tone of the discourse, and instead of leading it gradually in another direction, she paused abruptly, and quickened her pace towards the palace.

“Do not be so cruel, Miss Courtenay,” said Lord Dalmaine, “as to bring a conversation, which has proved most interesting, to an end so suddenly as you sometimes think proper. Indeed if you believe me unworthy of listening, I may say of understanding your sentiments, you do me injustice.”

Blanch did not answer, for the tenderness of his manner alarmed her, and she knew not what to say; while Dalmaine, who watched every change of her countenance, on perceiving she was distressed, thus continued :

“You were talking of flowers, and I will gather that little cluster of my favourite lily of the valley, which is doubly fragrant at this sweet hour.”

Blanch could scarcely thank him, as she took the lilies from his hand; yet those flowers recalled ideas that were worth some gratitude. Oh, what a guide to memory is the perfume of a single flower! What power is there in its sweet breath to waft us back to other days! to check the gaiety, or increase the sadness of the moment, by colouring it with the hues of the past. Its fragrance is like some silken clue, leading us back through a labyrinth of years.

But to Blanch's imagination, the lily of the valley bore a message from William. It had ever been mixed with his sweet offerings, and appeared now to upbraid her for having even listened to or established the slightest bond of sympathy with another man, by discussing a matter of feeling when she could no longer doubt he regarded her with more than common interest. The tears that had been long restrained now forced themselves down her cheeks; the flowers dropped from her hand, and without a word she quitted Lord Dalmaine. Hurrying through the cloistered passages, Blanch gained her home, and finding that her parents were already returned, sent to excuse herself from reappearing that evening.

But Sir Philip and Lady Courtenay had another guest in Lord Dalmaine, who arrived shortly after, and with whom some interesting and important conversation ensued.

CHAPTER V.

Is there not some mysterious instinct which has the power of warning us, when any thing relating to ourselves, or our nearest interests, is in agitation? If not, whence could the uneasiness arise which Blanch experienced, as she sat alone in her room, ignorant that Lord Dalmaine was at that moment with her parents? She had nothing to condemn herself for, as the conversation which had first taken place might, in fact, have passed between any two persons who possessed a similarity of taste and idea. Although she could not but perceive that Lord Dalmaine regarded her with admiration, yet, as we have before observed, he was most guarded in his attentions, and even had Blanch dreamed of the possibility of his making a formal proposal, she would have felt convinced that her conduct (par-

ticularly as regarded the flowers) was calculated rather to offend than encourage him.

But far different had been Lord Dalmaine's view of the case : the look that the thought of William had called up, the emotion, which the slightest association connected with his remembrance had the power of awakening, the sigh that could not be checked, the tear that could not be concealed, were all fondly attributed to another cause. Alas ! who can be blamed, for looking through that coloured lens which hope occasionally suspends before our eyes, investing the gloomy landscape with all the splendour of sunshine, even though contrast should render the reality more dreary, when the glittering medium is withdrawn ?

But to return to Blanch, she slept little, and, on rising the next morning, prepared herself for sundry questions and remarks, both on her absence the night before, and on her pale and distressed countenance. To her surprise and relief, the one was merely regretted and the other not hinted at ; yet there was something in the appearance of both her parents that inspired Blanch with a vague dread.

It was evident that something unusual had

occurred, and that Lady Courtenay was panting beneath the burden of a secret which she would fain have deposited, but for the admonitory glances of her husband. Sir Philip's whole countenance bore a character of subdued triumph of restrained exultation, and Blanch knew not why, but it seemed to concern her. Her uneasiness gradually increased, and could no longer be concealed, and yet it excited no surprise in either of her parents. She made her escape, as soon as it was possible, and seeking her little favourite retreat, began to occupy herself as usual, when a knock at the door startled her from her seat. Sir Philip entered, and taking a chair, placed himself exactly opposite.

“You must forgive my intrusion, Blanch,” he said, “for I come on a welcome errand, to quiet that little heart of yours, which shows its workings terribly in your telltale face. Although you thought proper to make your escape last night, lest the declaration which hung on your lover's lips should offend the nicety of your ear,—he has intrusted your father with the embassy, and deputed me to

lay his heart, hand, and every worldly possession at your feet.

As he spoke, Sir Philip purposely averted his eyes, lest he should increase his daughter's natural embarrassment; but he was not a little displeased when, in a voice that sounded quite unfamiliar to him, so changed was it by agitation, she replied, "I am sorry, very, very sorry, my dear father, that it is entirely out of my power to listen to Lord Dalmaine's proposals."

Sir Philip certainly did not expect such an answer; he had looked for an open confession of delight, and he therefore continued:—

"Do not, Blanch, make any of those useless and ridiculous answers, which are considered a point of etiquette on such occasions. You love Lord Dalmaine; and though you do not choose to own it by words, your agitation last night bespoke it plainly. He loves you; you have now been acquainted several months, and, during that time, thrown a great deal together; it does not require years for two young people well suited on all points to form an attachment. Therefore, my dear child, you may as well deal openly with your father, and confess the hap-

piness in which he shares. Had I the power of choosing a son-in-law, my choice would have fallen on Lord Dalmaine rather than any man I know in the world."

How wayward, how incomprehensible is human nature! The moment that Blanch had so long dreaded, at the bare thought of which she had shuddered, was at length arrived, but now a sudden and unaccountable courage animated her, as she replied;

"Do not suppose for a moment, my dear father, that my refusal is dictated by adherence to any foolish custom, it is the effect of mature reflection. I can only regret very much that my conduct should have been so far misconstrued by Lord Dalmaine; and even more, that you, my dear father, should desire any thing with which I cannot comply."

"Blanch," exclaimed her father, as he darted a look in which surprise and anger struggled for the mastery, "do you dare to trifle with me in this manner? Do you pretend to refuse the hand of one of the first nobles in England? a man of birth, fortune, and talents: one of our most rising peers; and a friend and favourite of his majesty?—It is impossible! You are

either mad or foolish; or do you carry this absurd jest so far merely to brave my anger?"

"Oh, no!" replied Blanch; "I have no such sinful intentions. I refuse the hand of Lord Dalmaine in all humility, in all gratitude for his preference;—but forgive me, my dear father,—oh! do not look so sternly on your poor child!—I am engaged to another, whose vows I had received before I ever knew that I was coming to England, or was acquainted with the existence of your friend." Blanch uttered the last part of the sentence in a faltering voice, and she bent her eyes on the ground; but the loud and blasphemous oath that burst from her father's lips, made her shudder more for him than for herself.

"And this," he exclaimed, "is the end of the obsequious duty, the hypocritical deference which you pay to your mother and myself; a continued course of duplicity towards those who have loaded you with kindness!"

"Oh, do not say so, my dear father," rejoined Blanch, in a tone of deprecation; "remember, before you condemn me, that for many years you allowed me to be absent; and that before I received your summons, I had

formed this attachment. Remember also, that neither you nor my mother have ever inquired into any particulars of my former life; and that the first moment it is necessary, I have told you the truth."

"And what beggarly foreigner," cried Sir Philip, "have you the audacity to compare with the high-born and wealthy Lord Dalmaine?"

"He is no foreigner," replied Blanch; "but has the merit of being born in the same island as yourself."

"His name and history?" insisted her father.

"His name," she replied, at once, "is William Clifford: he is an orphan who resides with his uncle in Italy, but has spent the last few years in travelling."

"This tells me nothing," continued Sir Philip; "to what county in England does his family belong? what is his fortune,—and his expectations?"

"I do not know," said Blanch, with more hesitation than before.

Sir Philip echoed her words, and then burst into a harsh laugh, adding;

“It may perhaps appear intrusive in me, if I inquire by what unaccountable exaggeration of self-sufficiency, this eligible suitor considers himself an adequate match for any daughter of mine?”

Blanch did not reply, and Sir Philip continued, in the same tone of sarcasm, “And where is this noble lover now, and when does he intend to claim his willing and expectant bride?”

“I do not know,” again exclaimed the poor girl in a voice of heartfelt sadness.

“Blanch Courtenay,” cried her father, “must I remind you, who you are? must I remind you of the name you bear, to show you in its true light the disgraceful engagement which you have formed with a man, who for all I know—for all you appear to know—may prove some low-born adventurer?”

She raised her head, she spoke once more unhesitatingly, while the blood of her noble ancestry mounted to her cheek and forehead.

“When you do remind me” she said, “of the name I bear, it must be to bid me remember that none who glory in that name should ever sully it by inconstancy and false-

hood. The engagement which I made with such a man as William Clifford, cannot be called shameful, but a breach of faith, an act of perjury, is as disgraceful, as it is wicked."

"And what," inquired Sir Philip, "what was there to love, or to inspire such constancy in a man who, by your own account, has nothing to recommend him, and in my opinion is some fugitive or outlaw from England? Answer me Blanch, what did you love in this William Clifford?"

"Himself!" she replied, while her eye fired at Sir Philip's contemptuous mention of her lover.

The workings of her father's countenance, during the short pause that ensued, were terrible for his daughter to witness. He had risen from his chair in the struggle of passion, and now dashing his clenched hand upon the table, he burst forth,

"I will have none of this Blanch! You must, you shall marry Lord Dalmaine."

"No! No!" she replied, "Never! Nothing can induce me to do so; I will never enter the sacred house of God, to pronounce a twofold perjury, to repay one man's affection by falsehood, and the other by treachery."

“Insolent and shameless girl!” cried Sir Philip, “beware how you exasperate me further, I will find means to compel your acquiescence, to force your consent.”

“There are no means of doing so,” replied his daughter, “neither do I think you would have the cruelty to attempt it; but, at all events, rather than enter into this hated contract, I would throw myself at the king’s feet and claim the protection of my country’s laws against an act of injustice and oppression.”

The fury of Sir Philip Courtenay was now at its height; but his tone was calm, though his eyes flashed. “Listen to me,” he said, “and be assured that although I speak in anger, I speak in earnest. Refuse Lord Dalmaine! and my doors are shut against you for ever.”

“I have no alternative then,” exclaimed the wretched Blanch, “but to return to my aunt’s roof at Bordeaux.”

“Do so,” he sternly replied, “you have my full consent, though you do not need that; do so, and beg your way on foot!”

As he spoke he darted one more fierce and angry glance at her, and left the room.

It was in a state of fearful agitation that

Lady Courtenay found her daughter, about half an hour after the interview with Sir Philip. Blanch was sitting in stupified silence, with her eyes fixed on the door, but no sooner did Lady Courtenay enter, than she rose and threw herself upon her bosom.

“Oh, my mother!” she said, “you will comfort me, you will advise me how to act!” Alas! Blanch forgot how incompetent a counsellor was the person she addressed.

Lady Courtenay was also much agitated, and the manner in which she addressed her daughter, was not calculated to sooth or pacify her. It appeared as if she considered Blanch as a child who had transgressed, and even while embracing her, Lady Courtenay accused her daughter of having acted improperly, ungratefully, and presumptuously towards her father; she was even more surprised than Sir Philip at Blanch’s obstinacy; for the duty of complying with his wishes had never been questioned by her; the possibility of withstanding them never entered her head. Since their marriage, she had never seen her husband so angry, she trembled at the thoughts of it, and how a weak and helpless woman could brave a man’s fury,

was to her perfectly incomprehensible. By Sir Philip's commands she bore a message to Blanch not to reappear until her determination was altered, or his made known.

There could scarcely exist a stronger contrast than that of the mother and daughter at this moment: there was a dignity even in the grief and agitation of Blanch, and the gentle resolution with which she listened to Lady Courtenay's pusillanimous arguments was no insignificant trait of her character. She found, indeed, there was no refuge in her mother's judgment or sympathy, for she had neither, and the poor girl therefore contented herself with answering respectfully, and entreating to be left alone, that she might compose her spirits. How does the first word of unkindness sear the heart that has only been familiar with affection! Blanch felt withered, crushed, overwhelmed. Neither did she know where to fly for advice. Dalmaine was the only person whom she believed capable of befriending her, and he was the last to whom she could have recourse in this, or, indeed, as matters now stood, in any other circumstance.

Something, however, it was necessary to do; William must be made acquainted with

her situation: he was in Paris, at least so she believed; but how to convey any intelligence to him was a matter of the greatest difficulty. Suddenly she remembered that Miss Bellenden, who had remained with the Princess of Wales at Hampton Court, had a relation at Paris, and that one day that young lady had asked if Blanch wished for any new fashions from the French metropolis, as she had constant communication with that city. To her, then, without any further preliminary, Blanch went, after having traced a few hasty lines to William Clifford. It was a point of great delicacy, but this was not a moment for scruples. Blanch found Miss Bellenden alone; and delivering the note, she told her, with all the composure she could command, that, if it were possible to discover the person to whom it was addressed, and to obtain an answer, her obligation would be unbounded.

Her manner, even more than her words, convinced the kind-hearted girl of the importance she attached to the mission. She thanked Blanch for the confidence she had shown in her willingness to serve her or any one in distress, addressed to her some words of kindness, with-

out venturing upon inquiry, or displaying the slightest curiosity; and from that day the two girls became constant companions.

However unhappy was the situation of Blanch, it was far preferable to the conflicting and perturbed state of Sir Philip's mind. To have been thwarted by a woman, and that woman his own daughter, was in itself sufficient to rouse all the anger of his proud nature. But when it was his darling project that she thwarted, when a word from the lips of a young girl had power to raze his fabric of ambition to the ground, his fury knew no bounds.

He felt that every moment was precious; and dreading the arrival of Lord Dalmaine before he had prepared his own line of conduct, he gave strict orders that no one should be admitted.

In sending Lady Courtenay to Blanch, he did not reckon much upon the power of her reasoning, but he fondly hoped that she might inspire her daughter with some of her own timidity, by assuring Blanch that her father's threats were uttered in earnest. But on the failure of the mission, Sir Philip determined to pursue another course, and, for the first time he condescended to admit Lady Cour-

tenay to his confidence. To her, indeed, he did not attempt to describe the feelings of anger, almost amounting to hatred, which Blanch's conduct had inspired. Next to the desire of self-aggrandizement, which was connected in his mind with Dalmaine's alliance, there was now an anxiety to mortify, to humble, nay to be revenged, upon his own daughter. These sentiments, however, were wisely confined to the genial atmosphere of his own bosom; for he was well aware that, though his wife might not openly combat, or condemn them, it was not in her nature to participate in any thing so cruel and unnatural. To her, then, he spoke of Blanch in a far different mood—rather in compassion than anger—as an erring, misguided child, whose ill-conducted education and ridiculous notions formed her only excuse.

He might, he said, perhaps blame himself, for having allowed her to remain so long with his sister, who was in no way calculated to regulate the mind of any young person;—while, to the unspeakable gratification of Lady Courtenay, he assured her of his belief, that had Blanch benefited by her example, she

would never have behaved in the disrespectful and unfeminine manner, which had provoked his anger.

“Still,” continued the wily hypocrite, taking his wife’s hand, “she is our child, Catherine, and her resemblance to yourself, must ever make her dear to me, let us then both combine to eradicate this foolish sentiment by gentle means, and pave the way to a happy union with Lord Dalmaine. To effect this we must act with prudence, both by him and Blanch. Do you now go to the latter, and tell her from me that, providing she will receive him on the same footing, as before his proposal, I will endeavour to forget her past conduct, and will not urge her any further on the subject. You can tell her if you please, that I have now known Lord Dalmaine for many years, and I will suffer no child of mine, to make a breach between us, nor would I expose him to the ridicule of the world, by having it openly shown that she has rejected him.”

Lady Courtenay, who at that moment, was all glowing with the recollection of Sir Philip’s affectionate speeches, and with the pride of being

considered worthy of his confidence, proceeded to her daughter's room, and returned shortly after with the following message:

“Blanch has charged me with her duty. She thanks you for your promised forgiveness, and will do as you require, on condition that Lord Dalmaine be made acquainted with her engagement to another, and informed that she receives him as a friend, and not as a lover.”

Lady Courtenay found a stumblingblock to their plan in this reply, but not so the wary Sir Philip. That very evening he had an interview with Dalmaine, on whose generous frankness he easily imposed.

Blanch, he said, was an only child, of a timid nature, who had never been called upon to act for herself, or to decide on any important point. Such a crisis in her fate apparently alarmed her, and although she returned Lord Dalmaine's affection, and was grateful for his preference, it was her wish to remain a few months longer under her paternal roof.

“I am almost ashamed my lord,” continued the practised dissembler, “to subject you to such caprices, but my daughter's happiness must ever be my first consideration, and al-

though I can scarcely hope that you will conform to her peculiar fancies, it is my duty to lay the truth before you, and to request from her, that you will not address her for the present in the language of love, or ever mention or even allude to the tacit engagement which will be understood to subsist between you. On this condition alone, will that wayward child of mine, listen to the proposals with which you have honoured her and me."

"Rather than relinquish the hope of your daughter's hand," exclaimed Lord Dalmaine, "I would conform to even more distressing conditions than these; but as I am not allowed to advocate my own cause, I must trust to you, Sir Philip, to do so for me, and shorten, if possible, the time of probation."

"You may depend on me," replied the other, "to hasten, by every means in my power, the dearest object of my ambition; but let me impress upon your mind, that any precipitancy would at once destroy our mutual hopes; and above all, that your engagement must be kept a profound secret."

"Unaccountable girl!" cried Dalmaine; "she must be well aware of the influence

which she possesses over me, to exact such conditions; but I have no alternative; it shall be as she wishes; you may tell her so from me; but add also, that I trust she will have some consideration for the sacrifice I am making, some regard for the peculiar situation in which she has placed me: at least, I may hope that her manner and conversation will repay me in some measure."

"Do not doubt it," said Sir Philip, grasping the young man's hand, while the satisfaction which the success of his scheme inspired, passed for pleasure and gratitude; "there are few joys," he added, "greater than that which a parent experiences, in trusting the happiness of a beloved child to one for whom his admiration and respect are unbounded."

They parted; and Sir Philip, rejoicing in his successful deceit, repaired to Lady Courtenay, to inform her of what had passed, and to instruct her on many points in which she could materially assist him. Edified by her husband's list of the motives which actuated him, she listened with servile deference; and, beguiled into the belief that they were working for the ultimate good of their child, Lady

Courtenay acceded without a scruple to the deep-laid plot.

On the other hand, Blanch, whose kindly nature shrank from any further dispute, and whose pure mind could never have imagined the baseness of her parents' conduct, was happy in being once more reconciled to them, and grateful that all thoughts of the marriage were put aside. She, moreover, fancied that she understood her father's delicacy with regard to Lord Dalmaine, and was only surprised that he himself could find any pleasure in the friendship of one whose love he had solicited in vain. She sometimes believed, indeed, that her father, and perhaps Lord Dalmaine himself, had calculated on the probability of her changing her mind on further acquaintance ; but she did nothing which could encourage such a hope, and in the mean time consoled herself with the belief that there was every chance of William's soon receiving the letter she had addressed to him.

CHAPTER VI.

AMONG the many proverbs with which the followers of David's wise son have kindly provided that part of the community who love better to clothe their ideas in ready-made language, than to select and adapt the materials which their own wits supply, none is in more general use than the homely adage of "most haste worst speed." Nevertheless, it may still remain a problem, perhaps yet to be solved, whether impatience, by sharpening the edge of observation, causes us to remark and overestimate those hinderances which might pass unnoticed were we not hurried, or whether stumblingblocks really start up with cruel pertinacity, merely to thwart our eagerness. Be this as it may, few will deny that an accumula-

tion of trifling annoyances is less easily borne than a single but powerful opposition. The same man, who, armed with a good weapon and a stout heart, might stretch the fiercest beast of prey at his feet, becomes a victim to the tormenting stings of insects, singly too small for more than a moment's attention. The horseman, when hurrying towards a wished-for goal, seldom permits a casual obstacle to impede his progress ; giving the rein to the noble animal beneath him, with a resolute application of whip or spur, he clears the barrier at a bound. But the case is more desperate, when his path lies over uneven ground, and where a thousand stones and ruts disturb the equability of the horse's pace, and gives his impatient rider only the choice of a steady walk, or a stumbling gallop.

In such a manner was William Clifford's anxiety to leave Paris, thwarted on every side.

Shortly after his arrival in the French metropolis, he had again written to his uncle, but in a more decided tone than before. He detailed Madame D'Aubry's account of her brother's overbearing and ambitious character ; he mentioned the reports which had already reached

him, of the admiration which Blanch had excited at the English court, and his belief that her situation, in consequence, must be one of greater sorrow and difficulty even than his own. He must, he said, earnestly entreat the chevalier, to make some final arrangement, or, at least, make known his intentions with regard to settlements, that he (William) might go to England, and claim his bride ; a proceeding which, in the present uncertain state of affairs, it would be madness to dream of. The style of William Clifford's letter was firm, but respectful and affectionate; for, although he considered his uncle's conduct, of late, harsh, he was not one of those who consider a single act sufficient to cancel the debt of whole years of kindness.

Many weeks elapsed without any answer from the chevalier, and when it arrived, there was little satisfaction to be derived from his reply. It was kindly written, but bore the marks of evident indecision : the writer assured his nephew, that he would take the matter into due consideration, and let him know the result shortly ; but he went on to beg him at the same time to defer his journey to England until he received a second letter. There was a cause

for this request; the kind-hearted old man concealed a painful truth, and with a want of selfishness, rare in any age, but even more so in advanced life, he wished to spare William the scene of another deathbed, so shortly after that of General de Brissac. Well aware that his health was rapidly declining, the Chevalier Clifford still sought to maintain, until his latest hour, the consistency which had characterized his whole life.

Such were his feelings; but, to William, his letter seemed strange, especially as it contained precisely the same injunction that had been given him at Bordeaux, by Dumont. "Could there be any connexion between them?" he asked himself; and, as he thus thought, he determined to make one vigorous effort to see the prisoner, and for that purpose to tell all that he had hitherto concealed to the Baronne de Bernay, whose great influence he could not doubt. His request for an interview was immediately granted, and Mirabel pressed him eagerly to tell her what was the cause of all the anxiety which she could not help perceiving.

By this time William sufficiently understood the character of Mirabel, to be sensible that

she deserved the confidence she had solicited, and he consequently determined to withhold no part of the truth. She listened with profound attention, while he described the accidental meeting with General de Brissac, and subsequent acquaintance with Dumont. She evinced a sincere interest in the friendship which he had formed with that extraordinary man, and appeared to take great delight in hearing Clifford dwell upon some of the noble feelings which the prisoner had expressed. There was, however, one part of the communication for which she waited impatiently; but Clifford mentioned the name of every person in Bordeaux, connected with his narrative, before he could bring himself to speak of Blanch. He tried to pronounce that name carelessly at first, still it was uttered unlike any other word, for William was but a poor dissembler, and Mirabel shuddered as she heard the name of her rival for the first time. Why, she knew not, but a dead weight seemed to fall upon her, a redoubled sense of desolation overpowered her, and yet she heard nothing new, nothing worse than she had before known. What could it be to her, that the chosen bride

of William Clifford was an Englishwoman, or that she was called Blanch?—what difference could name or country make in such a case?

Strange, however, was the effect it had upon her mind; for until this moment, to Mirabel's imagination it seemed impossible to penetrate a sort of vague uncertainty which concealed her rival. Now, however, she had seen her portrait, she had heard her name and history, and all the ideas connected with Blanch assumed as it were, a tangible form. She drew William into the description of that eventful evening, when he plighted his vows, and received those of Blanch Courtenay in exchange; and although he frequently checked the expression of the feelings which such a conversation necessarily renewed, there was enough of enthusiasm, in the look and tone, to inflict fresh pangs on the heart of his hearer; and yet she listened in silence, striving to conceal from the view of him she still so deeply loved, the sorrow that his narrative awakened. Once, indeed, she ventured to ask him, what obstacles could possibly tend to defer the union, which was mutually agreed upon; and William had a difficult task in affording her a partial

elucidation of the mystery. He would not disclose all the circumstances connected with his uncle's exile and attainder, because he felt that he had no right to do so ; but he gave her to understand, that the delay related to family arrangements, about which there was much difficulty ; he expected ere long, he said, to receive an answer from Italy, where his relative resided, and in the mean time, he entreated Mirabel, to assist him in discovering Dumont's retreat.

"You may, perhaps," he said, "accuse me of weak credulity in putting any faith in such mysterious words as those he addressed to me on his departure.—'Do not go to England until you have seen me again, I may perhaps assist you in the dearest object of your ambition.'—I will own that it is beyond my comprehension how a prisoner and a Frenchman can have any influence in such a case ; but still, baronne, had you ever heard him speak, had you ever conversed with him for any space of time together, I feel sure that you would be inclined to place the same implicit trust in Dumont as I have ever done."

"Nor do I doubt it," she replied. "I love to trust ; but, oh ! how seldom can I do so !

I thank you, William, for this last proof of your kindness, and I firmly believe it will lay in my power, to do as you wish on this occasion. From the dates which you mention, and from several circumstances which I now remember, I feel almost certain that the prisoner in question lies even now in Vincennes. The regent, wary as he is on such subjects, does not refrain sometimes from alluding to them in my presence, being well aware of the abhorrence in which I have ever held politics. The reputation that I have gained in this way, will now be of the utmost advantage, for his highness will never suspect me of any sinister views to his government, and consequently our purpose will be more speedily effected. Wait, therefore, with all the patience you can command, until you hear from me on the subject; and do not doubt but that I will set to work speedily in your behalf."

William Clifford expressed his gratitude, and they parted; nor was the wished-for opportunity long in presenting itself.

It happened a few mornings after the above-mentioned conversation, that the baronne was attending the levée of her royal mistress, when

the duke, in high good-humour, entered the room, to rally his royal consort on her indolence.

The duchess was at that instant employed in spreading several layers of rouge upon her cheeks, one of the few offices in which she refused all assistance, a sight that provoked her husband's gaiety all the more.

"Do me a kindness," he cried, laughing; "call the Baronne de Bernay from before that long glass, in which she must have seen her pretty self a hundred times, and bestow a little of that blooming colour upon her cheeks, where the lilies have of late sadly predominated. Do madame," he continued, as the duchess looked up from the mirror with an offended air; "I am sure you have enough to spare."

"Her royal highness," exclaimed Mirabel, stepping forward with a good humour that enchanted the duke all the more from his expecting some tart reply; "her royal highness, has granted me permission to try the effect of country air on these pallid cheeks, which, as you are pleased to insinuate, bear evidence to

the late hours, and dissipated lives we have all led of late."

"And if I were the duchess," replied the regent, "I would hear of no such vain excuse for idleness; and at all events, limit your leave to a very few days."

"Pshaw! Philip," observed the duchess, in a drawling tone, which she meant to be sarcastic, "you know, as well as I do, that the baronne must always have her own way, and that asking my leave is a matter of mere form."

"It seemed not the other night at the masquerade," whispered the regent to Mirabel; and then continued aloud, "And if it be not presumptuous, to which convent is this zealous recluse bound?"

"To my own humble chateau, near Vincennes, monseigneur," replied the baronne; "and now that I think of it, I would ask a boon of your highness, which I trust you will hear favourably."

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed the regent, laughing outright; "methought this sweet meekness, this submissive language, would lead to some-

thing of the kind; but let us hear it, pretty one!"

"Nay, monseigneur," rejoined the baronne, affecting to be offended, "I am too proud to present a vain suit."

"In good sooth, for pride, the first angel that fell might yield to the Baronne de Bernay," continued Philip; "but let me hear the request, and it shall be granted, if it were only to smooth that ruffled brow."

"Your highness may recollect," Mirabel began, "some time ago, giving me a pass to visit a distant relation of my father's, who is imprisoned in the Donjon de Vincennes; he is extremely poor, and, although in many respects unworthy, I cannot allow a De Bernay, to want for any thing. It is now more than a year since I saw him, and as I shall remain in the neighbourhood several days, your highness would greatly oblige me by repeating the act of kindness, and allowing me to visit my unfortunate kinsman, and inquire into his necessities. I am aware that the favour is a great one; but your highness knows that there

is no danger, in admitting so poor a politician as myself, within those terrible walls."

"I know, on the contrary, that you are the arrantest little diplomatist I ever had to deal with," replied the regent, "and that it is useless attempting to cope with you. The pass shall be made out in due form, and forwarded to your hotel. You would not care much, I fancy, to see your cousin at liberty, or by heavens I would not trust you in Vincennes! The gaolers themselves would do any thing for such a smile as that."

"Would they so, monseigneur," said Mirabel "then I must carry a fixed scowl upon my brow, or we shall have our good city of Paris overrun with more reprobates than ever. I almost wish you had not informed me of the power of a single smile; I shall be so curious to know if the prison doors would indeed fly open at the movement of my lips."

"And curious, moreover," rejoined the regent, "to subject the Duke of Orleans to one trial, while he brings you to another, and see whether justice or weakness would be his first

councillor on the occasion—in a word, to discover if he would bring that pretty head to the block, and deliver over that snowy throat, to the sharp embrace of the headman's axe."

"When I incur the penalty of the law, monseigneur," replied the baronne, with mock solemnity, "I trust that I shall have sufficient resolution to meet my fate without putting your highness's clemency to the slightest test."

"By Heaven! I believe it," rejoined the duke; "you would die, if it were only to deprive me of the pleasure of signing your pardon."

Mirabel smiled and courtseyed to the duke and duchess, entreating that the former would not limit his permission to a single visit, then taking leave of the royal pair, she drove to her own hotel immediately.

CHAPTER VII.

WHILE Mirabel was thus actively employed in his service, Clifford was awaiting the result of her efforts with the greatest impatience.

In the afternoon of the day in question, he was sitting at home, in expectation of a summons, when a youth was ushered into the room, in whom William had no difficulty in recognising Armand, the baronne's page and foster-brother, although he had laid aside the rich livery in which he usually appeared. He was the bearer of a note, which was brief but satisfactory, and ran as follows :—

“All prospers—meet me to-morrow morning (well disguised) at the entrance of the small park,

about eight o'clock. I mention this early hour, that you may return to Paris before your absence has been remarked. Appear at court to-night! Let every one see you there! M. DE B."

Clifford wrote a few hasty lines of acknowledgment, and intrusted them to the messenger, while he obeyed Mirabel's injunctions, and proceeded to pay his devoirs that night at the palace. On his return, he found a large packet containing letters, awaiting him, the outer cover of which was written by a friend of the Chevalier Clifford's, whose death it announced. It was couched in feeling terms, giving several details that were most valuable to William, and enclosing the papers with which the chevalier had entrusted the writer on his death-bed. With sincere grief William broke the seal of that letter which bore his uncle's handwriting,—it was evidently traced by a feeble and shaking hand; but the contents were as consolatory as circumstances could allow. The chevalier thanked his nephew for the duty and affection he had ever manifested, and rejoiced, for William's sake, that he was spared the repetition of so painful a scene as that of a death-bed.

“ I die,” continued the writer, “ in the faith I have ever professed, and in the allegiance for which I have suffered ; on both these points we have differed, but it has been in silence, and, believe me, your generous forbearance on all subjects has not been lost upon me.”

He then proceeded to give directions relative to the presentation of a memorial (referring to the title and estates) by which the letter was accompanied, and concluded with blessings on William and his future bride, and an affecting and eternal farewell.

William spent the night in perusing the memorial, and in weighing his claims in his own mind, claims on which perhaps depended the possession of one who was, in his sight far, far above every worldly advantage ; but as he once more perused the letter of his affectionate relative, he almost blamed himself for not feeling his loss more acutely. And yet he did feel it, and as the recollection of his second father, rose vividly before him, fancy led him step by step, over the whole track of his short, but eventful life. In such moments as these, memory will call all her wonderful powers

into action, and many remembrances connected with his early childhood, which had long lain dormant in William's bosom, were now awakened. The last smile of his beautiful mother, the caresses of his father, their English home, which was now occupied by strangers, or levelled with the ground, rose up before him,—all those calm but sweet delights that beam upon our happy childhood, before we leap the gulph of experience, before the head is bowed beneath the weight of disappointment and sorrow, or the heart becomes a prey to the insatiable host of feeling and passion, engendered by itself.

Turning from the past, he dwelt upon the prospect of Vincennes, and upon the possibility of seeing Dumont once again. When he recollected the prisoner, he could not help comparing him with the courtiers of the regent, and he asked himself if such superiority could walk the same earth as those with whom he had lately associated. Thoughts of Blanch, too, who might so soon be his, anxiety for the devoted Mirabel, and doubts as to the success of their mutual enterprise, chased each other in

succession through his mind. The current indeed was troubled, but still the thoughts of William Clifford were blessed, for the certainty of Blanch's affection was to him a haven of calm but blissful repose, to which he could ever direct the course of his reflections.

He stood by the window and watched with anxiety the first glimmer of the morning, and, eager for an excuse to depart, judged it best to leave Paris before he could be observed. Accordingly he arranged the disguise on which he had determined with great precision, and found it difficult to recognise himself when he walked up to the large mirror that adorned his principal apartment. His hair was of a different colour, and the elevation of his large military boots added several inches to his stature.

The morning was grey, cold and raw, a drizzling mist scarcely permitted him to discover the road, and there was something in the aspect of every object, that appeared to speak of frustration and failure.

William rode on, sometimes quickening, sometimes slackening his pace, but arriving long before the time of rendezvous, he waited

upwards of two dreary hours at the entrance of the Park of Beauty, still so called from the Chateau de Beauté, that once stood in the midst, and was a favourite retreat of the French monarchs. Charles the Seventh had bestowed this castle upon Agnes Sorel, surnamed La Belle des Belles, a woman whose disinterested affection and noble patriotism, seemed to have fitted her, for a better fate. The motive assigned for this royal gift, was to endow his favourite with a possession from which she might derive an appropriate title, and in consequence she was called the Lady of Beauty until her death.

Here William waited, gazing into the park ; but at length he heard the clattering of horses' hoofs along the hard road, and in a few moments perceived Mirabel followed by two pages, advancing at full speed. She wore the same dress as on their first meeting, while, on one shoulder was fastened the small insignia of office, then worn by the ladies of the court. She greeted William calmly, and her voice and manner were perfectly composed, but there was a fire in

her eye, and a flush on her cheek, which told her resolution, was that of excitement.

Causing her attendants to fall back, she rode leisurely by William's side in the direction of the donjon, and thus addressed him :

"You will be guided by what I say to the commandant; I need not enjoin caution,—for my sake, at least, you will be prudent: this enterprise is one of more danger, than you perhaps imagine."

"I know it, generous Mirabel," replied William, "I feel how selfishly I am at this moment acting, but even now it is not too late to recede."

"Oh, no, William," said his companion, gently but earnestly, "you wrong me, if you believe that fear would ever deter Mirabel de Bernay from serving a friend; but say no more, lest you destroy the self-possession which has cost me many hours to attain, or rather, unless you have any thing to ask, or communicate, do not speak to me until it is over—your voice has a strange effect upon me." She paused, and added timidly, "I will not ask you to be silent on our return."

By this time, they had arrived at the chateau which stood on one side of the tower, and was appropriated, with the garden adjoining, to the commandant of the prison. Avoiding this building, however, they rode up to the principal entrance of the donjon, where Mirabel delivered a small note addressed to the governor, who, in a few moments, hastened to the spot. Receiving the baronne with marked respect, he assisted her to dismount, and, leading the way, conducted Mirabel, and Clifford, within the precincts of this far-famed prison.

The baronne refused, with courtesy, his invitation to enter the chateau, assuring him that her time was precious, and then, with many preliminaries, she proceeded to display the regent's pass for her admission, and to explain the reason for which she had obtained it, and thus continued:

“My steward, who is better able than myself, to ascertain the real state of my cousin's pecuniary affairs, will, with your permission, perform the errand in my stead, while I await its result in the little chapel, which I once before visited on a similar occasion.”

“But, madam,” replied the governor, bowing low, and smiling sweetly as he spoke, “his Highness of Orleans has not specified the name of the unfortunate—I should rather say, the fortunate prisoner, who claims the honour of being allied to the Baronne de Bernay.”

“Ah, monsieur!” exclaimed Mirabel, with forced gaiety, “I know very well that state prisoners have so many titles, that their own relatives may well be at a loss. But my father’s cousin was once called Dumont, and arrived here from Bourdeaux, having made the Fort du Ha his residence for some time in ———, I have no head for these matters,—what was the month?” she inquired, turning to Clifford.

“Last May, as well as I can recollect, madam,” he replied. The governor’s countenance fell. “And you said, madam, that this gentleman was to be admitted instead of yourself?”

“To speak the truth, monsieur,” said the baronne, “my kinsman and I, are better friends apart, and, though willing to serve, I am unwilling to see him. My steward must, therefore,

stand my proxy, and, with your permission, he may now be conducted to the cell, while I take my way to the chapel, where he will find me on his return."

She spoke in a certain and decided tone, and the governor having once more inspected the regent's order, summoned the gaoler, and, offering his arm to the baronne, conducted her to the chapel. With a pertinacious civility, which Mirabel did not dare discourage, he tormented her with a long and detailed account of all the curiosities and particularities of this little oratory. To her relief, however, he was at length called away upon business, and she was left to the society of her own reflections.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE sacred building in which Mirabel stood had been founded by Charles the Fifth, and dedicated to the Holy Trinity and the blessed Virgin, but that monarch did not live to witness its completion. His successors, however, continued to regard the chapel of Vincennes with due consideration, and transported thither many valuable relics, amongst which was a large metallic bason, brought from the east by some pious crusaders, that had frequently served as a baptismal font, for the royal children of France. The interior of the chapel, which was purely gothic, had ever been admired for its graceful architecture, the ceiling was richly ornamented, and the painted windows (the work of Jean Cousin) were justly celebrated for their

brilliancy. Mirabel paced up and down the aisle, endeavouring to compose her mind; which she found a sadly difficult task, for her imagination followed William into the prisoner's cell, while fancy ran forward, and traced the consequences of all she had done for him. She thought upon his departure, which might soon take place—she pictured to herself the meeting with her he loved, and then Mirabel's proud heart, as if willing to increase its own sorrow, dwelt upon the moment when William would relate to his bride, all that passed during their separation. Pausing, and meditating, she took a painful pleasure in dwelling upon every anticipation, scanning minutely all that William might tell to Blanch, were he so inclined; how Mirabel de Bernay had loved him, unwooed, while the happy and triumphant Blanch would exult in the power of her memory, over the affections of Clifford. At the thought of her rival, Mirabel worked up her imagination, until she fancied more than was probable; she saw Blanch listening in silent pride to her lover's narrative—she beheld the smile of scorn, and heard the chilling tone in which the severe

Englishwoman pronounced her name, classing her, perhaps, with things too light to speak of. And William too, would he forget her and all she had done—ay, and would still do for him? or would he remember her only with cold compassion by the side of one he loved, mentioning her name with pity, or hushing it altogether, lest it should offend the delicacy of Blanch's ear? At the picture thus presented the fiery blood of her mother flamed through her heart: Then suddenly burst forth again upon her soul, that stream of fearful passion which William's presence had lately quelled; then came the thirst of revenge, the flash of deadly hatred towards her unconscious rival; together with a thousand quick and stirring thoughts,—cruel gratification at the sorrow which William's absence must occasion,—fierce hopes of the effect that separation and all its thousand chances might produce, and presumptuous murmurs against the justice of Heaven.

“Oh, my God!” she cried in bitterness of spirit, “why am I denied that happiness which falls to the lot of thousands? Why, why am I the sport of those feelings with which thou hast

endowed me? Oh, rather let them become changeable and evanescent as the world in which I live: let them every day, every hour, be fixed upon a new object, or centred all in self! Then, then, at least, I shall be happy; then I shall imbibe the spirit of the air I breathe;—regret and memory will be lulled to eternal sleep, and my heart, yielding up its weight of fidelity, will become vain and empty, but light and buoyant as the gossamer that dances in the sunbeam!”

She paused, and clasped her hands together, until the veins swelled beneath the pressure. She groaned aloud, and the silence that reigned through the little chapel appeared to mock her grief. But when passion had in some measure subsided, a new change came over her.

Since her fatal attachment to Clifford, Mirabel had been familiar with sorrow; but there are many links in misery's chain, and latterly the noble spirit of devotion and self-command which had actuated her, brought with it a balm to her wounded feelings. Loving virtue and excellence as she did, Mirabel now quickly

became sensible of the extent of her error, in tempting the wrath of heaven by vain repinings ; and the fierce and ungentle thoughts which she could not quell, became hateful to her, almost while she indulged in them.

She paused before the high altar, and hardly conscious where she stood, lifted her eyes to the painting which adorned it. It was an "Ecce homo," the work of the matchless Guercino, whose pencil, dipped in the colouring of a pious heart, has gone farther towards portraying the incorporation of the divine and human nature, than any other which has attempted the awful subject. It were, indeed, a hard and callous heart, that could look unmoved upon that picture—on the heavy, yet still beaming eye, the parted lips, the bleeding brow—that brow which God had stamped with the seal of majesty, and man, impious and profane, had lacerated with the insulting mockery of a painful crown—dignity in suffering, heroism in resignation, and sublimity in meekness !

As Mirabel gazed upon the painting, a sudden stream of radiance burst through the gothic

window, chequering the pavement with many a brilliant and variegated hue, and falling in full, pure light upon the blessed features, of the Son of God. To the wounded and irritated feelings of the sufferer, that sudden ray, which, piercing the gloom of a wintry sky, fell in clear splendour upon the sacred picture—to Mirabel it appeared a messenger of promise, of peace and consolation,—her heart melted—thoughts of early piety, of youthful pleasure in the act of pure devotion, stole sweetly over her mind, like a soft and cooling wind over some burning and arid desert, reviving, refreshing, and renovating in its progress. She sank upon her knees, she leaned upon the balustrade of the altar, and poured forth her soul in supplication, striving to purify it of earthly feelings, and to turn her thoughts towards the Hope that fails not. Earnestly, sincerely, and solemnly did Mirabel pray, until the blessed consolation of tears, “the lovely dew” of the heart, was granted her. She lifted her streaming eyes to the picture before her ; she remembered that he had wept at the tomb of Lazarus. She thought of her brother ; of that

beloved brother, with whom her first prayers had been uttered—Gaspard who was now a heavenly spirit! Her heart was opened—her feelings changed. Anger, revenge, and jealousy were drowned in the effusion of new hopes; and in her humble solicitations yet one more being was remembered—Mirabel prayed for her whom William loved; she prayed that she might be blessed; that she might prove worthy of such love as his. She restrained her words, she wished, but she did not pray for death—but she prayed for rest—rest of spirit.

As she thus mingled supplication and thought together, she heard a light step behind her; and a voice pronounced her name gently—a voice that thrilled to her inmost heart, even while it checked her tears.

“I feared you were waiting for me, Mirabel,” said William, “and did not know how sadly you had been employed.”

“Oh, not sadly!” she replied, “happily, blissfully; but let us go, you have much to tell me, and even in this holy sanctuary we are not secure from the treachery of man.”

She took one more long look on the picture, as if to impress it on her memory, and then, with a heart overflowing with gratitude, she left the prison. Of the commandant, who treated her with obsequious attention, she then took leave, recommending her kinsman to his notice, and intimating the possibility of her return on the same errand: after which, she mounted her horse, and rode off hastily, accompanied by William and her two attendants. Having then proceeded for some way in silence, she checked her pace, and turning to Clifford, inquired what had been the success of his visit.

“ I had much trouble,” he said, “ with the gaoler who was intrusted with my guidance to Dumont’s cell, for he was both old and infirm, and, as I afterwards found, churlish withal; I suppose he discovered my impatience, for he appeared to have a peculiar delight in leading me through interminable corridors, at the slowest possible pace, informing me, as we went along, that I must make the most of my

time, for the commandant had no particular fancy for prolonged interviews ; at last, however, we stopped before a small low door, which had the number affixed to it, mentioned by the governor. As the gaoler commenced his task of unlocking and unbolting, he examined my countenance in a way that was not calculated to increase my predilection for him ; but, finding that his tardiness could elicit no murmurs from me, the cross-grained old man, at length opened the door, and half thrusting me in, told me he would return in half an hour. The transition from daylight to almost utter darkness prevented me, at first, from perceiving any object, and it was not until I had shaded my eyes with my hand, that I could benefit by the glimmering light of an iron lamp that was suspended from the vaulted roof. A small table, on which lay some untasted and uninviting food, a miserable bed, and broken chair, were the only articles of furniture which met my eye. But in the centre of the dungeon stood its noble inmate, his arms folded on his breast, and his eye fixed on me,

with an expression of surprise, but perfect calmness. I could not speak at first, but I advanced a few paces, and then the voice, whose equal I have never heard, demanded, in its calmest tone, "To what cause may I attribute the unusual appearance of a stranger?"

"Is it so long," I asked, "since we met that you can apply such an epithet to me?"

I once told you, Mirabel, how great is his self-command, and even at this moment he said but little. Yet his countenance expressed the welcome of his heart.

"William Clifford!" he exclaimed, as he approached and embraced me tenderly. "I little looked for this; I fancied you could not, or you would not find me. Come under the lamp, it is long since I have seen a human face. You are indeed the same," he added, smiling, "though that disguise is admirable; your whole figure is changed, and you appear as tall as myself."

"I am glad of it, Dumont," I replied, "then my purpose will be answered, for in that dress you shall one day leave the Donjon of Vincennes."

“ Good God !” cried Mirabel, “ what have you done ?”

“ Wrong !” answered William ; “ ungenerously perhaps by you, and rashly by myself. But you must forgive me ; before I ever dreamed that you would be instrumental in procuring this meeting I had sworn to deliver Dumont from prison.”

“ And have you,” rejoined the baronne, in a low and tremulous voice, “ have you calculated on all the difficulties and dangers attending such an enterprise.”

“ I have,” replied her companion, “ and find none of sufficient magnitude to dissuade me from my purpose. There is only one thing upon earth that can prevent my attempting Dumont’s rescue. If you withhold your consent, Mirabel, it is needless to say I must relinquish it ; but let me assure you that you need not be implicated in the affair ; should my scheme fail, I will leave you in possession of a letter that will go to prove I made use of the pass with which you had intrusted me to visit another person, and you cannot, therefore, pos-

sibly incur any blame, except in the imprudence of allowing any one else to execute your commission."

"I was not thinking of myself," replied Mirabel, sadly; "selfish fears, William Clifford, had no share in my thoughts; but tell me, how did Dumont receive the proposition?"

"I told him much in a few words; I combated his scruples, and obtained his promise; and the next time I enter the dungeon of Vincennes, it will be to remain in his stead."

Mirabel heard the rash project in speechless terror; for she knew by Clifford's calm and resolute manner, that his determination was fixed. She listened to his scheme; she gave him some valuable counsels; but the trials to which she was to be subjected this day, were not yet at an end. Clifford told her that he had entreated Dumont to explain the promise intimated in his note, and that the prisoner then assured him that he possessed secret influence with the court of England, which would be glad to conciliate him by granting a request that would cost it so little, as the

restoration of the Clifford estates. William then informed the baronne of his uncle's death, and that it now only remained for him to procure the release of Dumont, who would convey the papers to England, whither he proposed following immediately, should his scheme prove successful.

"This day week," he said, "is fixed for the attempt; and if you will intrust me with the pass, and plead indisposition as an excuse for not accompanying me, I do not think that any danger can accrue."

Mirabel smiled sadly; but her feelings were too deep, her resolution too firm, to speak of her intentions, and she therefore merely replied,

"We will, if you please, meet this day week, at the same hour, on the same spot. I will procure a conveyance for Dumont as far as the coast; and you, in the mean while, will obtain a passport for yourself, and take leave of the regent. But now, William, we must soon part, and perhaps we may never have another opportunity of conversing together;

for the next time we meet, nothing must be touched upon that is likely to unnerve the mind. If not for my sake, at least for the sake of Blanch Courtenay, let prudence guide you in this perilous undertaking. I have a melancholy foreboding, that is but too often the forerunner of evil." Mirabel hesitated, and drawing the glove off her beautiful hand, she took a ring from her finger. "Do not refuse to accept this," she said; "it will bind you to nothing but to provide for your own safety. My cipher and lozenge are engraven upon the stone; and should you at any time, in the execution of this scheme, be in danger or difficulty, send me that ring, and if it be in the power of mortal I will save you."

William took the ring, and as he did so, he raised the fair hand respectfully to his lips.

"I did not tell you," continued the baronne, "of the manner in which I obtained the pass from the regent. I have been a sad dissembler, William, but it was for your sake; and when you think of poor Mirabel, and all her faults, do not forget that she strove to provide

for your happiness at the expense of her own."

"Believe me, that not one of the innumerable proofs of your generosity will ever be forgotten by me," answered William, earnestly; "sincerely do I wish that it lay in my power to serve, or even to oblige you."

"I would give much," replied Mirabel, colouring deeply as she spoke, "to possess something that had once belonged to you,—the little chain you always wear"—

As the baronne spoke, she placed her hand gently on the chain; but William's young horse, alarmed by the movement, swerved suddenly on one side; the links, which had become entangled in the embroidery of her riding-dress, snapped asunder, and falling to the earth, were trampled beneath the animal's hoofs. William was not more distressed than Mirabel; to both it appeared an omen, though of a different signification; placing the remnant of the chain in his bosom, and springing to the earth, he endeavoured to collect the scattered links, but in vain.

“I am sorry,” he said, “that you should have asked me for the only thing in the world which it is not in my power to give you.”

Mirabel sighed deeply.

“Forgive me, William,” she said, “for having destroyed a gift evidently so dear to you. Alas! this warning was not needed to convince me that, had I the power, or even the inclination to break the bond of that union, such an act would only sever us more completely.”

William knew not how to answer her,—he looked at the broken chain, and then at the ring, and even while he remembered the conditions of the last gift, it appeared to accuse him, of having wronged Blanch by its acceptance.

Mirabel read his thoughts—she bade him farewell hastily—she waved her hand; and ere William could reply, she put her horse into a smart canter, and was soon out of sight.

Clifford followed her example, and on arriving at his hotel, dressed with more than usual care, showed himself in all the frequented quarters of Paris, and went to court in the evening. Here he once more encountered Stanley, who had

come to take leave of the royal family; and, Clifford regretting the misunderstanding that subsisted between them, offered him his hand, which Roland accepted—though not with the warmth of former days. As he did so, his quick eye recognised the stone which had so often sparkled on Mirabel's hand, and feigning to admire its brilliancy, Roland confirmed his belief that it bore the coat of the De Bernays. He made no remark, but left the palace at an early hour, to prepare for the morrow's departure.

CHAPTER IX.

THE morning of the appointed day was like one destined for some great undertaking. There was war in the heavens between light and darkness, and the sun was struggling with a host of sable clouds that followed each other in rapid succession, but was unable to scatter them from his path. The wind joined to aid the adverse clouds upon their way, urging them continually forward, and driving them rapidly over the face of the sun, which consequently emitted brilliant but fitful rays. Cold and boisterous, and blowing directly from the north-east, the wind vented the remnant of its fury upon the earth, rocking the trees, whirling the dust in columns, and howling round the head of man in loud and angry menaces.

On such a morning, William Clifford took leave of his Parisian abode, having used every possible precaution in that quarter. He had dealt munificently with his landlord and the servants, whom he dismissed; and had sent all that he possessed secretly to the baronne's chateau, excepting a sum of money which he carried on his person. After giving out that he intended to go into the country for a few days previous to his departure for England, he thrust the papers relating to his uncle's estates into his bosom, and mounting his horse, proceeded in the direction of a house on the boulevards, where he was to assume his former disguise.

Possessing in an eminent degree that elevation of sentiment, and fearlessness of spirit, which only required the development of opportunity to assume the form of heroism, William experienced a proud satisfaction, as he considered the dangers of the enterprise in which he had now embarked; and even while his thoughts turned towards Blanch, he felt that such an

action as the one he had in view, would render him more worthy of her love.

His train of thought was interrupted by suddenly being accosted by a stranger, whose manner and address were those of a gentleman and a compatriot.

"If I am not mistaken," he began, "I am speaking to Mr. Clifford, sometimes called the Baron de Brissac?"

"The same, sir," replied William, checking his horse as he spoke; "if you have any business with me, may I request that you will be speedy in your communications, as I am on my way to an appointment."

"You must pardon me then," continued the stranger, "but my errand is an important one; and having been absent for some weeks from Paris, the necessary delay has been already prolonged. I am the bearer of a letter to you; and the charge that I received with it, determined me to present the paper in person."

Clifford broke the seal, and read the few but emphatic words in which Blanch described her painful situation. He knew not what to do;

he could not return to the house and attempt to reply to Blanch, for had he had time to do so, he could offer no account of himself but the alarming truth. The stranger watched the passing struggle in silence, and then urged him to return for a few moments to his hotel, in order to write the answer. But William assured him that this was impossible, totally and entirely impossible.

“That is strange,” replied the bearer of the letter, “for the lady from whom it came, impressed me with the belief that it required an immediate and satisfactory reply.”

“I trust,” said Clifford, “that it may lay in my power to return you one in a few days.”

“A few days!” echoed the stranger, “I should be sorry to take upon myself the responsibility of such an answer; I must request, indeed I must request, sir, that you will oblige me by some message, however laconic, that at least *I* may not incur the suspicion of having failed in the trust confided in me.”

William reflected for a few moments, ignorant

of the stranger's connexion with Blanch, how could he reply through his means ?

"Tell her from whom the letter came," he said at length, "these words :—' Qui bien aime, tard oublie.' "

The stranger smiled cynically, put spurs to his horse and was out of sight in a moment ; while Clifford, not daring to dwell on what had passed, dashed forward with the speed of lightning, assumed the disguise, and found the baronne waiting alone, at the appointed spot.

She wore a small silken mask, ostensibly to shield her from the piercing wind, but more probably to conceal the emotion, against which she struggled ; and yet she laid it aside immediately on arriving before the prison.

They rode forward side by side in silence ; Mirabel did not dare to raise her eyes upon that being whom she loved so fervently, lest the recollection of his danger should unfit her for the task she had undertaken ; and yet at every step they took, she felt painfully that the time was drawing to a close, when the possibility of seeing him again, of hearing his voice, or rejoic-

ing in his presence, would be at an end. What hope, what comfort was there for her, in prospect? the object of their enterprise was speedy and eternal separation, with a possibility of danger and death befalling one, to save whom she would have yielded her life without a murmur.

In any case she could not hope to see him again, while the thought of suspense, the prolonged suspense she was doomed to suffer, first during his escape from prison, and then after his arrival in England, made her heart sink within her. William attempted to speak, but when he did so she trembled from head to foot, and waved her hand as if entreating silence. They arrived, they sprang to the ground, and the baronne calling every energy into action, drew the mask from her face, and inquired for the commandant. As if to heighten their distress, the governor was engaged; but the principal officer entreated the Baronne de Bernay, to walk in the garden until the commandant was at liberty to wait upon her. Followed a step behind by Clifford, who was to personate her

steward, she paced up and down for some time without speaking. But the tenderness with which her heart was overflowing could not long be restrained.

“William,” she said, raising her large full eye upon him, with an expression of the most devoted affection that ever filled the breast of woman, “if my prayers can reach the mercy-seat, you will be preserved. Do quickly what must be done, lest you put my resolution to too strong a test. God bless you! God protect you, *my* William!” Alas! she knew he was not hers, and yet she loved to say so.

“Tell me,” she cried, “tell me, even if you know it to be false, that we shall meet again; and when you are gone, when you are happy, oh! let me live sometimes in your remembrance; let my name sometimes be pronounced by the voice that I shall never hear again. Hark! hark! there are footsteps; the governor is coming! William! speak to me, comfort me, strengthen me!” Once more she cast an appealing look upon him, a glance replete with

sorrow, fear, and tenderness, that harrowed William's soul.

He pressed her hand, he bade her farewell, he blessed her in a voice where firmness struggled with emotion, and thanked her for all she had encountered for his sake. Mirabel did not trust herself to reply; but at that moment, every sacrifice she had made was undervalued in her mind.

When the governor entered the garden, she approached him with a firmness for which William was not prepared. "I am come," she said, "to trespass for the last time on your goodness, as I return to Paris in a few days."

"Am I to understand, madam," inquired the governor, with somewhat, as she fancied, of a cynical tone, "that you wish to be admitted yourself this morning? for the orders lately have been doubly strict regarding visits."

"I know it well," she replied; "but I have many reasons for visiting my kinsman by proxy. As I before told you, we are not the best friends in the world; besides which, our negotiations relate to pecuniary matters, and I have

no head for business. I must therefore request you will repeat your kindness by admitting my steward this morning."

The governor shrugged his shoulders, and led the way; but not until Mirabel, in a tone of authority had desired William not to detain her long, and signified her intention of awaiting his return in the little chapel, as before. Thither she now proceeded, in a state of mind which it would be useless to attempt describing. She knelt upon the same spot; and although the fervency of her supplication enabled her in some measure to support the agony of suspense and terror, yet her prayers produced none of that calm and blessed repose which she had felt upon a former occasion. She rose at length, and listened until her sense of hearing became painfully acute, and her own convulsive breathing grew audible and distinct; she checked her breath, and then the beating of her heart forced itself upon her ear. She heard a sound! the door was pushed aside, and a figure appeared on the threshold; the resemblance was so close, that Mirabel fondly

hoped the scheme had been abandoned. The man advanced—he bent his knee to the high altar—and on leaving the chapel, he dipped his hand in the sacred water—and made the symbol of that faith which William Clifford did not profess. The baronne thanked the commandant for his courtesy, she mounted her horse, and, followed by her companion, left the precincts of the prison slowly. No sooner, however, had they entered the park, than she gave the rein to her horse, a movement that was imitated by Dumont.

They proceeded rapidly through an unfrequented part of the domain, and arrived at a small shed, where Mirabel knocked gently at the door. It was opened by Armand, her page, who led forth two stout horses, one of which was immediately mounted by a boy in the dress of a countryman.

The baronne whispered a few words in Armand's ear, and then turned to Dumont. "We must part here," she said; "for the fidelity of your guide I will answer with my life: he has my orders for your route; and

on the coast there lies a vessel, commanded by the boy's father, one of my own tenants. I have no further power, but my earnest wishes will attend you ; one word—when is the hour of escape ?”

“ Sunset,” replied Dumont.

Mirabel shuddered. She then offered her hand, which he received with grateful respect.

“ Could you,” he exclaimed, “ taste the ecstasy of restoration to freedom, of breathing the pure air of heaven, or gazing without interruption on the face of nature, your noble heart would be repaid.”

Again she bade him prosper, while Armand mounted the horse from which Dumont had just alighted, and then galloping home by several by-paths, the baronne regained her chateau, before many of its inmates had suspected her absence.

Dumont watched her turn the corner of the road.

“ Gracious Heaven !” he exclaimed ; “ are not the degenerate sons of France shamed into heroism, by the example of such a woman ?”

CHAPTER X.

SHALL we follow Mirabel through that dreadful day; shall we dwell upon the prolonged terror of every hour, or tell how she watched the sun's course in the heavens, and longed for, even while she dreaded, the hour of his setting? That moment came at last; dark clouds had for some time concealed his progress, and yet she remained with her straining eyes fixed upon the sky. The sun reappeared, like a globe of condensed fire, shorn of his rays, by the surrounding mist; and, as Mirabel gazed upon it, she fancied she could read William's destiny in the threatening and portentous aspect of the heavens. She had never been so sanguine as either Dumont or Clifford, nor did the knowledge of their plans inspire her with any feeling of security.

The scheme that had been agreed on for Clifford's escape, was as follows : William was to conceal himself behind the door in such a manner, that when the gaoler entered he might spring upon him, and, taking the necessary precautions to prevent the old man from crying out, bind him with a cord he had procured for that purpose. Clifford was then to possess himself of the keys, and the long loose dress which the gaoler wore, and, locking the door behind him, to descend the stairs, in the character of a porteclefs. So far the locality appeared to favour their views ; for Dumont had been confined in one part of the donjon which was then thinly tenanted, and those officers who were likely to detect the fraud were consequently engaged in another part of the building. The rest of the scheme had been devised by the baronne and her page, and the latter was by this time at his post in the wood, with two saddle-horses, pursuing the same plan as Dumont. With this difference, however, that Mirabel had intrusted William's guidance to her own foster-brother, and that she recommended a southern route, towards the

coast, as less likely to be tracked. To relieve her own anxiety, she had arranged to mount one of the turrets of her chateau, and fix her eyes upon a particular spot, where she could perceive the two horsemen pass, and Armand was to wave a white scarf, in order to distinguish them. But Mirabel looked in vain, she saw nothing, she heard nothing, but the gathering mist of evening and the whispers of terror. One hour of agony, of prolonged apprehension passed, after the time at which she might reasonably have expected them; it was almost dark, and yet her quick eye caught sight of a solitary horseman, who bore no scarf! A quarter of an hour elapsed, and she heard the clattering of a single horse's hoofs on the hard road. Mirabel flew to the private entrance, and Armand, pale and breathless, threw himself at her feet.

“All is lost!” he cried, “the gaoler was changed, the new one was young and powerful, they struggled, and he was overpowered; so much have I learned from one of the soldiers. By this time the regent knows all! Fly, madam,

fly; every blame must attach to you! There are horses in the stable, and Armand will follow you every where!"

"Fly, Armand?" said Mirabel, from what should I fly? what have I to fear now?"

"All, every thing!" cried the affectionate boy, "imprisonment, torture, death, dishonour!"

She shook her head—she smiled—Oh, God, that smile!

Armand kneeled before her, he seized the hem of her robe.

"Oh, fly, fly!" he said, "it will be too late soon; by all you love, by all you ever loved; for the sake of William, of Gaspard, save yourself by flight!"

"You talk idly, boy," she replied, with a calmness of tone that was appalling, when compared with the wild wandering of her eye. "You bid me save my life for the sake of one who is dead, of one who soon may be so; would you advocate the cowardice which clings to mere existence, when every tie connecting it with happiness is snapped asunder?"

"But, oh!" continued the page, "remember every circumstance that will aggravate the re-

gent's fury; consider," he clasped his hands together, "consider that neither your rank, nor your sex, can exempt you from those laws which revenge may carry into effect—think on the possibility of torture."

There was again that fearful smile!

"It would not last, Armand," she replied; "the heart that is nearly broken with the pressure of misfortune, would yield to the first pressure of pain."

"Lady," cried the boy, distractedly, "we drank life from the same source, and when your noble brother and mine, left his house, he bade me watch over your safety, and never, never quit you; for his sake, for mine, remember what you will be subjected to—the insolent taunts of the Duke of Orleans, the aspersions he will cast upon your spotless reputation. Though death may have no terror, dishonour can have no charms."

"Armand," replied Mirabel, proudly, "my innocence is known to God, and to him I love the best on earth; what is the voice of the world to me?"

Armand rose in despair, wounded, perhaps,

that his sincere affection should have so little effect upon her mind—so slight a value in her esteem. Mirabel read his thoughts, and she gave him her hand.

“Do not believe me unmindful of you, Armand, unmindful of the only being in this breathing world that loves me. Yet listen to me, Armand; there may be a chance, a possibility of saving him, and there is no one to attempt it but myself. Say no more! I will remain.”

That same night, at a late hour, the Baronne de Bernay was placed alone in her coach, and conducted, with a strong escort of gendarmerie, to Paris. It was in vain that she requested the attendance of one of her women or even her page, the orders on that head were precise. She felt these things little, however. The blow which Mirabel had sustained in hearing of William's failure, had, for the moment, stunned all her mental faculties. Alone, in the dead of night, on her road, as she believed, to the regent, whom she might now consider as the bitterest of her enemies, she experienced

no sensations of terror or alarm. As the coach drove heavily along, the baronne strove to rouse herself from this species of stupor, and to meditate upon the course she should pursue, but in vain; every power seemed paralyzed by the shock she had lately received. The carriage, at length, stopped before the palace, and Mirabel inquired whither she was going, but the officer of the gendarmerie merely replied by a military salute. Yet the baronne read in his countenance a degree of pity that consoled her, and, while threading the innumerable corridors by his side, she again addressed him.

“You are conducting me to the regent?” she said.

He made no answer, but by a look of unequivocal compassion.

“For the sake of that mother whose affection or whose memory is dear to you,” she continued, “for the sake of her, who at one or other moment interested the tenderest feelings of your heart, do not refuse my prayer! I have exasperated the Duke of Orleans, you know him sufficiently to calculate my danger; acquaint his mother

of my arrival, let her be informed that I humbly solicit her presence."

The officer placed his hand upon his heart, and his finger upon his lips, then knocked at a door which they now approached. It was opened by a page, who admitted the baronne and then instantly quitted the apartment. Mirabel looked up and found herself in a small writing-closet appropriated to the regent, who was now seated at the further end by a table, on which lay a confusion of scattered papers. The room was lighted by two large silver sconces immediately above the duke's head. He seemed busily employed, and did not lift his eyes until the page had withdrawn. When he did so, and perceived the prisoner standing alone in the centre of the apartment, every angry and evil passion appeared upon his countenance to enhance its native ugliness. He looked at her for some time, and she sustained his glance in silence.

"Approach," he at length exclaimed, "Baronne de Bernay, and deny, if you can, the charges which are preferred against you; but before you do so, let me warn you to avoid that

course of falsehood and subterfuge in which you have lately dealt. On one day last week you procured from the regent a pass into the prison of Vincennes, under false pretences? I await your reply, madam."

"I did so," she answered.

The duke proceeded.

"On the next day you rode to the said prison, and there most treacherously introduced into the cell of a state prisoner, an Englishman, by name William Clifford, who passed on that occasion for your steward. Can you refute my assertions?"

"When I am able to do so with truth," replied the baronne, "I will presume to interrupt your highness, and not till then."

"Moreover, this morning you returned in company with the said Englishman to the dungeon, and there, in direct defiance of the established laws of your country, and the duty and allegiance you owe to the king your sovereign, you aided and abetted the escape of a state prisoner, thereby subjecting yourself and your accomplices to the extreme penalty of the

law.” Once more the regent paused, but receiving no answer, continued as follows :

“ Do not be so misled as to imagine that the law will be violated on your account. Neither your youth nor your beauty, madam, can have any weight in the public trial to which you must be brought. The only step I could take in your favour, was thus to see you myself, and listen to any defence you might think proper to make. It appears to me that you have none, and although your demeanour towards myself has ever been cold, haughty and disrespectful, yet I am weak enough to regret the sacrifice of one who has forfeited every claim to my mercy and consideration.”

As the Duke of Orleans paused to take breath, he felt a strange mixture of opposing sensations with regard to Mirabel. On her first entrance the desire of intimidating, of humbling her lofty spirit, had been paramount to every other ; but when he saw her with the traces of sorrow and suffering, on her once beaming countenance ; when he found those lips from which the jest and the repartee once flowed so gaily, closed in the silence of despair ; when he believed,

that fear had triumphed over pride, then the natural kindness which was too often obscured by baser feelings, for a short time became apparent. He rose and advanced towards her. "Mirabel," he said, "there are conditions on which you may secure your safety. Denounce William Clifford as one who abused your confidence, and possessed himself of the pass, under pretence of negotiating your kinsman's affairs! Do this, and inform me of the place where the late prisoner lies concealed, and you are safe. Here are writing materials, and I will witness the deposition myself. Thus you will not only be rescued from all danger, but spared the terror and disgrace of a public trial."

He took her hand with more gentleness than was usual to him, and attempted to lead her towards the writing-table.

Mirabel however disengaged her hand, and replied: "I am indeed grateful for your highness's merciful intentions, but if the conditions you name be the only chance of escape, they will avail but little. The scheme for entering the prison was planned and executed by myself, while William Clifford acted on that occasion

according to my injunctions ; and as to betraying him, for whom I have already risked so much, your highness knows me better than to entertain so mean an opinion of my fidelity." She spoke calmly, but sadly, and measured her words, lest they should injure William's cause. The baronne's answer once more roused the duke's anger, even though he admired the resolution she displayed.

"By Heavens!" he cried, "you trifle with me and with yourself. Madam, do you seriously refuse the only possibility of escape?"

"I must do so," she said, "I have no choice."

The regent gazed at her for a moment in silent astonishment, and then exclaimed, "Tell me, and beware of prevarication or falsehood, what strange interest have you suddenly taken in the fate of this prisoner? a man of whose existence I believed you ignorant."

"By replying to that question, monseigneur," answered the baronne, "I might implicate myself and others."

"By the blessed martyrs!" exclaimed Philip, as he again rose from his chair, "this is not to

be borne ! Are you aware, madam, that there are means which never fail—ay !” he added, “to wring confession from the proudest lips, and to clothe it in tones of deep-felt anguish ?”

“Such means would fail with me,” replied Mirabel, losing the depressed tone in which she had hitherto spoken, and answering him boldly, “for I would rather follow the example of the Athenian woman, and tear out my tongue by the roots, than suffer it to betray or compromise a friend !”

Every word, every moment, added some new feelings to the many that already struggled in the Duke’s bosom : there was love, if it deserved the name, anger, indignation, jealousy ; but now the suspicion, which he had long harboured, was nearly confirmed, and, in order to discover all, he made a great effort to suppress his feelings.

“Misguided girl !” he continued ; “do not thus rashly reject every possibility of salvation until it be too late. Your obstinacy, believe me, will only hasten the fate of that friend in whom you profess so mysterious an interest. Confess all to me : it is your duty—your interest

to do so: tell me what hidden motives, what secret reasons, urged you to so rash a step. Since we have been acquainted, I have ever heard you profess a hatred, nay, a contempt, for political cabals."

"Most true," she replied; "and may the God of justice be my witness! that no motives of a political nature induced me to further the prisoner's escape; neither was his deliverance in any way connected with political considerations."

"Could this be proved," rejoined the Duke of Orleans, craftily, "it might be of service, not only to you, but to all who are implicated in the transaction. Yet how can I—how can any one, believe this to be a fact? You tell me that William Clifford, who now lies at Vincennes under sentence of death, was but an instrument in your hands. Had the case been reversed, I could have believed the possibility of that unfortunate young man's sacrificing himself for some high-flown notion of friendship, after what has lately reached my ears respecting his intimacy with the prisoner at Bordeaux."

Mirabel's natural acuteness was deadened by grief and anxiety, her penetration numbed, and she fell but too easily into the regent's snare.

"I never said that William Clifford was an instrument in my hands," she replied, "I merely affirmed that the plan was concerted by me, and that all blame should consequently be transferred to me alone. Your royal highness is right; William Clifford, during his residence at Bordeaux, contracted a zealous friendship with this man whom they call Dumont, entirely divested of all political considerations, the bare mention of which was prohibited in their intercourse. Clifford applied to me to procure permission for him to visit the prisoner; and instead of laying the case before your highness, I judged it safe to procure a pass for my kinsman. It can easily be conceived how the wretched appearance and melancholy state of the captive worked upon the generosity of his friend, whose rash attempt has failed. But allow me once more to repeat, that I must be considered as the culprit—I, who first laid the plan—I, who imposed upon

your highness's generosity—I, who conducted him to Vincennes as my steward; who aided and abetted the escape of one, and would have done so for the other."

"Your explanation, madam," rejoined the duke, with a sneer, "is the most inexplicable part of the affair; for you now tell me, that the interest in the prisoner's fate is all on the young Englishman's side; and yet you boast that the execution of the plan was your own. Am I to attribute this glorious conspiracy to the gratitude you owe the royal family of France, or to the ridiculous and disgraceful farce you have been so long and so vainly playing with this young foreigner?"

"Farce!" echoed Mirabel, as she clasped her hands together.

"Farce, madam!" repeated Philip, at length giving way to all the violence of his passions; "Tell me! If you have any hopes of mercy for yourself or him, answer me truly, before I abandon you both to a fearful and ignominious death—do you love this Englishman?"

As he spoke, he grasped Mirabel's hand rudely; and, with a countenance on which the

struggles of rage and jealousy were but too plainly depicted, he looked on her as if he would have torn out her heart to see what was written thereon. But it was not necessary; this direct appeal overcame every scruple of pride or caution. Suddenly her animation returned; her eye recovered its light, and for a moment a smile beamed on her countenance.

“Love him!” she exclaimed; “ay! as I love justice, and hope for mercy! Love him! with all the passion, devotion, and fidelity of which the human heart is capable!”

The regent heard her; and as she uttered this unfortunate and incautious speech, he dashed her hand from him. “May his death,” he cried, “be rendered doubly bitter by that very love, may he now, and for ever—”

“Be blest!” exclaimed Mirabel, interrupting him eagerly, and lifting her eyes to heaven.

“He dies, minion!” continued the infuriated Prince; “before to-morrow’s sun has set; and the very words you have spoken shall cause the rack to give him a foretaste of death.”

“Oh, no! no! no!” cried the wretched Mirabel, casting herself at the regent’s feet;

“ You will save him ! You must, you will save him ! ”

She hid her face between her hands, while the duke looked down upon her agony with bitter exultation.

“ Save him ! ” he said, “ yes ! to be daily insulted by his presence ! to see him in the possession of her for whose love I myself have so long and so vainly sued ? No, madam ! the time is now come when your conduct demands some return. Your trial shall be deferred, and your heart set at rest, in the first instance, about your favoured lover. We will travel together to Vincennes ; it is a road that you have passed before in the company of a younger and a handsomer gallant than myself. We will see the prisoner ourselves ; we will learn if his discretion can withstand the torture ; we will question him as to the route of his friend and your’s ; we will discover if his fanatical Calvinism will require a Hugonot priest to attend his latest moments ; we will bid him take leave of the world, and of ourselves. Oh ! trust me, it will afford no slight amusement. We shall have

tears, and vows, and tokens; we shall have goodly talk of constancy and resolution, of courage and example.”

“Would you drive me to madness?” cried Mirabel, starting to her feet; “Would you make me believe that some fiend has borrowed the likeness of a man, to heighten the misery of such an hour as this? My only prayer is for death, and that all the horrors with which you have menaced William Clifford may fall on me—on me, who merit them doubly, as a servant of the crown, and as a native of France. Let him be pardoned, banished for ever, if you will, and let me abide the fate which my own conduct has entailed.”

“Your subtlety can no longer impose on me,” rejoined the duke; “you have reckoned too highly on your boasted wit, madam. It cannot disentangle you from such schemes as these. But I see through your plans. You think to procure the freedom of your lover; and, after a useless display of courage, to obtain your own pardon by some preconcerted *coup de théâtre*, while Philip of Orleans is to

become your laughing-stock, when, with your wonderful talent for evasion, you stand on the shores of England, by the side of your triumphant lover. But it shall not be so," he added, with a sneering smile ; "you must still live at court, my fair Mirabel, that I may at last taste the sweets of revenge, and day by day revel in every tear and sigh you lavish on his tomb."

"As you hope for justice! as you hope for mercy!" she cried, "grant me William's pardon!" and let the bitter stroke of the law fall on her who is guilty."

"Content yourself, Mirabel," replied the Duke, in the same tone of contemptuous triumph, "this wonderful display of heroism has lasted long enough. You love this Englishman, but the light of the sun must be dearer to you than that of his eyes. He shall die; but my hand would rather sign its own death-warrant, than consign so lovely a victim to the executioner. Be therefore grateful that I do not take you at your word, or understand in their literal sense these sublime professions of resolution."

“ This is surely not a moment,” replied the baronne earnestly, “ to affect courage if I did not feel it. It is misery that makes me fearless, for I have ever held bodily anguish as light when compared to the sufferings of the mind. You speak of torture ; what are broken limbs to a lacerated heart ?—you speak of death, the pang of which lasts so short a time and is followed by rest, Oh God !” she added, raising her eyes, “ call not my hope presumptuous, which looks for that mercy with Thee, which is denied me by my fellow sinners.” Once more she paused, and then added, “ Hear me ! and esteem my words as those of one already condemned, who dares not lie upon the threshold of eternity ! Do as you say, condemn William Clifford to death, and, in violation of the laws you profess to uphold, attempt to shield the real criminal. I will enter the tribunal of justice, I will be my own accuser, and summon the governor and gaoler of Vincennes with my own servants to corroborate my confession, and there, in the face of the nation, I will demand the doom which your cruelty, not your mercy, denies.”

“Not so, Mirabel,” exclaimed the regent, “I will watch over that precious life, and preserve in spite of yourself, but not to bless a rival.”

A sudden thought, a sudden ray of hope, flashed on her mind. There seemed still one chance of saving him she loved, and, though the burning hues of shame forced themselves into her cheeks, forehead, and bosom, she spoke in a low but distinct voice.

“William Clifford is betrothed, he does not return my love, and when I ask his life, it is that he may be restored to her who has received his plighted vows.”

The regent heard, and giving way to the first and more ignoble feelings of his heart, he suffered a laugh of brutal exultation to burst from his lips. “Is it so !” he exclaimed, “and has the proud heart of Mirabel de Bernay learned at length, by sad and humbling experience, what others feel?—and have those smiles of which she was so chary, been wasted upon one who does not feel their worth? Oh ! what a tale for the myriad with whose feelings she has sported !—Do you not fear, sweet one, to trust a

secret so important to my keeping? Do you not dread the voice of the multitude that will whisper as you pass, behold the hapless and rejected damsel who sued in vain for William Clifford's love?"

"Philip of Orleans," cried the baronne, raising her head proudly, while her form and face breathed indignation from every line, "You have this night proved yourself unworthy the name of a prince, a man, and a Christian; you have broken your plighted word to protect and assist me; you have taken advantage of my wretchedness to entangle and perplex me; you have abused your power to oppress me, and now you have added insult to injury, and laden me with taunts which, were I a man, I would hurl back in defiance at your head. But you are aware of my inability to revenge myself: I am a woman, an orphan, unprotected, friendless, miserable. You have exercised a cold-blooded and cowardly tyranny upon me; you have dared to offend my ears by the open declaration of a guilty passion, and have basely owned it led you to revenge! Where are your

titles of 'Just but merciful,' when such detested motives regulate your conduct? Where your boasted generosity, when you glory in the wretchedness of one who has never harmed you? Will not my death, or eternal separation from him I love, satisfy the craving of your vengeance? Can the disinterestedness of my motives awake no answering emotion in your mind? All I ask, all I require at your hands, is to restore William Clifford to my rival."

"Such devotion," said the regent, in a subdued and altered tone, "will melt his heart. Who could venture to compare any other woman upon earth with you, Mirabel?"

"Do not fear it," she continued; "the affections of William Clifford are too deep, too pure, to be so evanescent! Nor would Mirabel de Bernay ever stoop so low as to accept an impulse of momentary gratitude, in return for her love." She watched the regent's countenance while she spoke. "You are wavering between mercy and vengeance," she cried, "oh! let the blessed spirit of charity rise triumphant in your mind!"

Again she knelt before him, exclaiming.

“ Philip, Duke of Orleans, grant me Clifford’s pardon, and all the love that honour can command is yours for ever ! Deal with me then as you will ; the rack shall extort nothing but blessings on your head, and my latest prayer shall rise from the scaffold in your behalf !”

The Duke of Orleans passed his hand before his eyes, as feelings, which were foreign and unfamiliar, poured upon a heart not obdurate by nature, inclining it to clemency ; while Mirabel remained kneeling at his feet, with her head bowed over her hands, her eyes closed, and her whole frame visibly agitated, as she felt that the last appeal had been made. Oh ! dead to every feeling of generosity and honour must that man be, who could look unmoved on anguish such as hers, or steel his heart against the eloquence of grief so profound ! Fallen, indeed, from that superiority, which invests him with the proud privilege of supporting, defending, and protecting woman, is he who can fail her in the hour of need, when, casting aside the vain disguise, in which she strives to veil her weak-

ness, she throws herself upon the protection of the nobler sex, designed by infallible wisdom as her defence and stay.

Corrupted as the regent's heart had become, cruelty had never been an inmate there; and even in his public functions, the dictates of mercy were never slighted, when compatible with justice. He now looked upon the beautiful girl before him, whose virtue, notwithstanding her caprices, had inspired a sensation of reverence, that in some degree chastened his feelings towards her; and his determination was fixed. He moved quietly towards the table, and traced some hasty lines, to which he affixed his sign and seal. Scarcely had he done so, when the door opened, and his mother entered the room. The noise of her footstep attracted the baronne's attention; she raised her eyes, — she beheld the regent standing beside her, with a paper in his extended hand — she started up — she seized it — she pressed it to her lips — then turning to the duchess, she uttered a cry of joy, and fell senseless in her arms.

CHAPTER XI.

DURING the time occupied by these occurrences, events were proceeding at Hampton Court in their natural course. The accounts which Sir Philip gained of William Clifford were more favourable to his views than he had dared hope. Tracing his unconscious enemy from Bordeaux to Paris, he heard of him there as the companion of the regent, the darling of the fair Parisians, and lastly, as the declared lover of the most beautiful maid of honour in the household of the Duchess of Orleans. True or false the news was invaluable, and Sir Philip was determined to husband it to the best advantage. Feeling sure that he would not be supposed to speak impartially, he thought it best to observe a profound silence himself, while Lady Courtenay was directed to excite her daughter's curiosity, and urge her to

inquiry, by alluding to the reports in a vague manner. In this, however, Blanch disappointed their scheme, for if her mother's insinuations made any impression upon her, she took care to conceal it most effectually.

In the meanwhile Miss Bellenden had received no answer from Paris, and Blanch had never referred to the circumstance of the letter since the first day, so that the subject most frequently in the thoughts of both, was entirely banished from their conversation. Mary Bellenden, a lively warm-hearted girl, was only withheld by scruples of delicacy, from soliciting her friend's confidence; and, partly guessing the truth, she was puzzled to account for a reserve which formed no part of her own character. From a casual correspondent at Paris, she learned that her cousin, to whom the note for Clifford had been intrusted, was absent from the metropolis, but was shortly expected to return.

This piece of intelligence she communicated to Blanch forthwith as a sufficient reason for the delay; but there was another part of the letter which caused Miss Bellenden much uneasiness, and many doubts as to what course she should

pursue. Her correspondent entered into the details of Parisian society, the gossip and scandal of the court, and amongst other things mentioned the engagement said to subsist between the beautiful and hitherto the insensible Baronne de Bernay, and a handsome young Englishman, by name William Clifford. The writer, seemed confident of the truth of this report, although Mirabel de Bernay, she said, still endeavoured to keep up the appearance of that cold indifference in which she had so long gloried. Mary Bellenden was puzzled how to act: from many circumstances that had passed, she could no longer doubt her friend's attachment to Clifford, and her spirit rose within her, as the possibility of Blanch's being forgotten and neglected, suggested itself to her mind. Yet the tale might not be true, and even if it were true, what plea could she find for disclosing the secret to Blanch, except by mentioning the report in casual conversation, a plan against which her heart revolted. For young and happy as she appeared, Mary Bellenden had felt what true affection is, and she shrank from the idea of inflicting a wound on the

sensibility of another. Could Sir Philip have fathomed her thoughts, what a powerful instrument she would have been in his hands, to what useful purposes might he have shaped and modelled her feelings on the subject!

In the mean time, Lord Dalmaine, who had been absent on duty for some little time, returned with his royal master and the rest of the court, from London. The few intervals of leisure which he enjoyed (when an increase of duty occupied the greater part of the day, and the whole of the evening), were dedicated to Blanch. This did not surprise her, after what had passed, as she firmly believed that Dalmaine's pride shrank from the disclosure that his suit had been in vain, which an abrupt secession from the society of the Courtenays might appear to imply.

About this time, Roland Stanley made his appearance at Hampton Court, bringing with him a letter of recommendation from Madame D'Aubry to her brother. At another moment, Sir Philip would most probably have treated his sister's protégé with neglect; but his

arrival seemed now most apt, and might be most advantageous. Keeping the whole thing a profound secret from Blanch, Sir Philip obtained an invitation for the new comer to the royal table, and sat next to him, loading him with civilities. He soon divined a part, at least, of Stanley's character. He talked with interest of his dear sister, and assured Mr. Stanley, without remorse, that Blanch had often spoken of him as an old and valued friend. He then proceeded to mention William Clifford, with an expression of countenance, and a gesture, that implied, "We understand each other on that subject, at least." Then changing his tone, he hinted at the admiration which one of his own friends evinced for his beloved daughter, who, he feared, had entangled herself in an ill-advised engagement, which her ideas of rectitude compelled her to keep.

He, himself, could know little of the truth, he said, but from various reports that had reached him, he had every reason to believe that, at least on one side, the vows had already been cancelled. Mr. Stanley would forgive the anxiety of a

parent, and the liberty he took in opening their acquaintance by so confidential a conversation, but Madame D'Aubry had mentioned him in terms of the highest respect, as a man of probity and feeling.

Stanley, on his part, confirmed in some degree, the reports relating to William Clifford, but he spoke only of appearances; for he was a cautious man, and there was something about Sir Philip's manner, that led him to distrust the intrinsic value of the confidence he expressed.

Stanley, therefore, kept back all he thought on the subject, and the greater part of what he himself had witnessed. Still, it was no difficult task to persuade him that it would be a charity to undeceive Blanch, as her own father had not scrupled to hint that she now bitterly regretted the circumstance that deterred her from accepting Lord Dalmaine's proposal.

They parted mutually pleased; Sir Philip at possessing so powerful an ally, and Stanley at having so soon gained a footing at court, and so easily discovered the means of obliging one

who might in the end prove most useful to him.

They were to meet at the reception that evening; and Sir Philip returned to his own apartments to escort his wife and daughter, anxiously looking forward to Blanch's meeting with Stanley.

Her eye was caught by his appearance the moment she entered the room, though he stood at some distance, in a little knot of courtiers, to whom his new friend had presented him. Unprepared to meet him, Blanch, for the first few seconds could not recollect who it was, and the pleasure she derived from seeing him was at first vague and confused.

It was the memory of the eye alone; though the associations that were stirred up by his presence, made her heart beat quick. She did, indeed, not know how he was connected with William Clifford, or why the little chapel of St. Estelle rose before her, as if in the glass of some fabled magician; but it was only for an instant that she remained thus bewildered, and then she recognised the friend of Ma-

dame D'Aubry, the associate, at least, of her betrothed husband. Quitting her mother's side, she traversed the apartment alone, and had greeted him warmly, before she perceived that a proceeding so unusual had attracted universal attention.

The sudden appearance of one who, though destitute of any other recommendation, has been our companion in the sweet summer-tide of our brightest days, who has trodden the ground that is dear to us, and looked upon the countenance of those we love, can no longer be an object of indifference, when the blessed reality has passed away, and cold and receding recollection becomes its scanty substitute. Together we can refresh the fading colours of the past, and by reviving the outline, recal in some measure to our minds, the original beauty of the picture, even though its primitive grace and brilliancy be lost for ever. Even the sound of the voice under such circumstances often becomes interesting from the associations connected with it, from the recollection of some other, some well-loved voice, which we have

heard mingling its tones with the one that now sounds in our ear. Blanch had, in fact, experienced a pleasure she little anticipated, in meeting with Stanley, and he was sincerely gratified by her warm reception ; though, as he looked on the once joyous face, he began to doubt some part of Sir Philip's information. In the course of conversation, he observed how fondly she hovered round the mention of those scenes in which Clifford had taken a prominent part, and when he himself first pronounced her lover's name, he watched with regret the high excitement that her countenance displayed. It required no further explanation to enlighten Stanley in regard to the real state of the case, and prove to him that the father had advocated his own cause rather than that of his daughter. Yet Roland was not unwilling to forward the views of Sir Philip on higher principles than those which generally actuated him. He firmly believed in the infidelity of William, and although the animosity which the conduct of the latter had excited, might perhaps diminish his reluctance to make it known to Blanch, yet Stanley with

all his errors, was not one to sacrifice the happiness of two hearts for any pitiful feeling of revenge. He judged it right, indeed, and honourable, an act of friendship to the lovely girl who had so kindly welcomed him, to bid her tear from her heart an image that was unworthy of so pure a shrine. Yet, with all his tact, Stanley was at a loss how to commence on so delicate and painful a subject. He knew how to deal with men of the world, how to cope with their subtlety or withstand their opposition, but the task he had now imposed upon himself was entirely different from any he had hitherto undertaken. He resolved to go on, however; and, to his honour be it spoken, that the caution which characterized him was now exerted for the best of purposes, while commiseration for Blanch dictated every word he uttered. He talked much of the changeableness of the world, a theme which he introduced by an expression of gratitude for her kindness.

“Consistency of disposition, my dear Miss Courtenay,” he said, “is, believe me, the rarest of all qualities: one which it is all but impossible

to find. Sentiments, however deeply rooted they may appear at the time, almost invariably give way beneath the changes of circumstance and those whom we have known and liked at one time, and in one place, are but too soon and too easily supplanted in another, where new interests spring up daily before us, shutting out those which formerly adorned our path."

Blanch fancied that the speaker was alluding to some report of her marriage with Dalmaine, and she hastened to remove the impression from his mind.

"Oh, no!" she said, looking up ingenuously as she spoke, "do not say that, Mr. Stanley; or at least exclude both yourself and me from such an imputation. Those whom I have once loved become doubly dear in absence; those who are not present appear always to have a prior claim to my thoughts, and in the mood which approaches the nearest to pleasure of any kind they are remembered more than ever. I judge from my own feelings, not possessing that power of diving into the thoughts of others, for which my dear aunt used to give you credit. But the mention of her name alone would

supply me with innumerable proofs of my argument; you know how kind she was to me, and I believe you know that I was not unmindful of that kindness, and yet how often now I think with regret of many little instances in which I might have sacrificed my will to hers, and I feel at this moment, that I would comply with any request she chose to make. So attached am I to the memory of the past, Mr. Stanley," she added, smiling, though her countenance was expressive of deep feeling, "that I verily believe Madame de Beaulieu's conversation would appear rather edifying than otherwise could she start up before us at this moment. I have always thought, I have always found it true, that a crowded room is the place from whence our thoughts and wishes fly the fastest towards the few that we love." She paused, and felt almost ashamed at having been betrayed into so long an oration. They were standing together in the recess of a large window that looked out upon the private garden which was brilliantly illuminated, and Blanch turned that way as if to admire the

scene. Stanley sighed, from a feeling of sincere grief, and, after a few moments' silence, replied :

“Such feelings as those you describe do honour indeed to the possessor, but forgive me my dear Miss Courtenay, if I express my belief that they are a fatal gift, entailing certain and lasting pangs. I do not mean to address you in the language of specious philosophy, when I affirm, that to enjoy a proportionate share of happiness in this world, our mental organization should more or less resemble that of the mass of human beings with whom we have to deal. Do not misunderstand me, or suppose that I would uphold that weakness which leads us into folly and error among the foolish and the vicious. Far is it from intention to broach such an opinion in your hearing ; but I speak from sad experience, when I ask why should we still entertain and cherish a regard for one, whose own evanescent feelings have long since been transferred to another object ? Is not that devotion useless and unprofitable which still trims and feeds the lamp, although the shrine has long been removed or demolished ?”

Blanch smiled, "I would choose a shrine," she said, "that was too firmly established for any casual accident to overturn it."

"You believe so," replied Stanley, "and you believe also, that it would be in your power to ascertain its stability. Or to speak plainly, you fancy it possible to collect from a knowledge of his other qualities, whether constancy forms part of a person's character; but I will show you how you may be mistaken; you discover that a fund of sympathy exists between you, you fathom its depths and find similarity of taste, opinion, and feeling, and strong in the knowledge of your own constancy, you fondly believe that in this particular also, the resemblance is complete. Alas! the moment of conviction is most bitter, bitter to those whom it most nearly concerns, and bitter let me also add, to those who from conscientious motives venture to display the painful truth."

"Blanch looked up with an alarmed air, "Mr. Stanley," she said, "your words imply something more than I at first believed: deal openly with me, I beseech you; your language, nay, your very looks convince me that some

distressing communication is weighing on your mind. You have known me before; in happier times, you were always welcome at that house which was more a home to me than any other. Treat me as a friend, there is no one near to listen to our conversation; the band sounds too loudly for any one but myself to hear you; what is there hanging over me?—what is it that makes you bend a look so full of compassion upon me?”

Stanley was moved. “You have divined the truth,” he replied, “and believe me, my dear Miss Courtenay, that I am induced to break the truth to you myself, lest you should hear it in a ruder manner and from less friendly lips. I have lived little among women—amongst the young and gentle such as you are—but do me the justice to think that my intention is kind, though my communication may appear abrupt and ill-worded. I offer you the advice that a parent, a brother, or a friend, might offer you in all sincerity, in all interest for your happiness, when I bid you to forget him whose inconstant heart has already thrown down your image to place a less worthy

worthy idol on its alter ; waste not the precious gift of your affections on one whose corrupted tastes and perverted morals render him totally undeserving, totally incapable of appreciating the singleness and purity of such a heart as yours. I pain you, but the truth must be told, and William Clifford like many a self-righteous character, has fallen a prey to the dissipation of Paris and the snares of a beautiful but designing woman."

Blanch heard him in silence, she looked around the room to remind herself of the spot in which she stood, she turned towards the window and beheld the calm and peaceful landscape without, and still the fatal words rang in her ears, and deprived her of almost every other idea. Suddenly a thought struck her, and though her bosom heaved so as to render her breath short, and her voice almost indistinct, she exclaimed,

"Beware, Mr. Stanley, how you lend yourself to the designs of others, or allow any one to persuade you to inflict so deep and cruel a wound as this !"

“You wrong me, Miss Courtenay,” replied Stanley, as he gazed on her with sincere compassion, alarmed at the effect which his words had produced; “I will attest the truth of what I have said by any sacred oath that you may name. Could you believe me so base—so cowardly? Oh, no! I forgive but too easily the first burst of surprise and sorrow. I would not have chosen this scene, or this moment, for such a conversation, had I not feared another opportunity might never present itself.”

To convince her, though it cost him an effort, he gave the account of William’s first meeting with Mirabel at Versailles; their interview at the cross; the scene in the garden on the night of the masquerade; and above all he dwelt upon the ring which he had seen on Clifford’s finger. He assured Blanch that her lover no longer wore the golden chain that on his first arrival at Paris appeared his dearest possession; that he had positively intimated his determination not to leave Paris for England; and that he had known of Stanley’s destination without one word of greeting to Blanch Courtenay.

How the poor girl heard him through with sufficient composure not to attract the attention of the whole room, was almost miraculous : but Sir Philip, who had watched from afar the progress of Stanley's discourse, now stepped forward, exactly at the proper moment, and laughingly insisted on disturbing their tête-à-tête, as both Lady Courtenay and himself wished to retire.

Blanch extended her hand to Stanley, lest he should suppose she still suspected his motives ; while he, feeling conscious that he had acted rightly, nevertheless participated sincerely in the grief that his narrative had caused. They did not meet again, for a few days afterwards he was summoned hastily and unexpectedly to Scotland.

The morning after the explanation with Stanley, Mary Bellenden, who was ignorant of all that had passed, brought a letter from her cousin in Paris, for Blanch's perusal. It related his hurried interview with Clifford ; the difficulty with which he extorted the laconic answer ; and the excuse made by William, that he was on his way to an appointment. The writer then pro-

ceeded to rally his fair cousin on the interest which she displayed in a man whose heart was enthralled, and who, according to many people's belief, intended some day to invest himself with a legal right to the fortune, as well as the affections, of the Baronne de Bernay.

Blanch read the letter with all the firmness she could command ; for alas ! what was it but a confirmation of Stanley's sad tale !

Mary Bellenden watched her with interest : "Forgive me," she said, "if I have erred in giving you this letter ; but my cousin's word is to be depended upon, and now that he has repeated reports which I have before heard, I considered it incumbent on me to make you acquainted with the whole affair."

"You have done right and kindly," replied Blanch ; "and I thank you from my heart ; but you will excuse my saying any more on a subject that is most painful to me."

"As you please, dear Blanch," added Mary Bellenden ; "but as it is to be a forbidden topic for the future, allow me merely to suggest that I trust you will have sufficient pride to take the earliest opportunity of proving that

your happiness may be secured in another quarter."

It was well-meant, but was certainly an injudicious and not over-refined speech; and it wounded Blanch deeply; but she made no answer, except by thanking Mary Bellenden for her kindness.

Some time after, Blanch had a second interview with her father, in which his manner evinced more sorrow than anger: he remonstrated gently with his daughter, but at the same time wounded her pride in the most sensitive part, while he appeared anxious not to do so. Intentionally and carefully avoiding all mention of Lord Dalmaine, he inferred how painful it was to him to hear the reports that were studiously circulated, that his daughter was pining for a man who had long ago forgotten her. He confessed it was galling to hear the whispers, to observe the sneers, which he had not the power to quell; but added that he supposed some enemy had taken delight in spreading intelligence which ought carefully to be concealed; he even went so far as to hint that the king himself occasionally rallied him on the subject.

Stung to the quick by the insinuations of her father, bowed by disappointment and sorrow, Blanch left his presence, torn by conflicting feelings that would have excited the compassion of any less obdurate heart. At one moment, she felt convinced of the sad truth, that she was destined to experience the same humiliating fate as many others, too common an occurrence in the world, to excite much surprise or sympathy when known. At the next moment she scorned the thought of William's inconstancy, and recalling his words—"Think of me as you do now till you know me dead, or see me changed," she condemned herself for having listened to the report against him for one moment. Still Roland Stanley's evidence seemed conclusive, and above all, the circumstance of the ring was one she could in no way account for.

However, she shut up her sorrow in the recesses of her heart, relying solely upon the hopes and consolations springing from that source, the balm-bestowing waters of which, are never denied to those who seek them in sincerity; and, strengthening herself with prayer, she determined to await, in silence,

the issue of events over which she had no control. Yet every day weakened her hope, her faith in William's constancy; she knew that he had received her letter, and again and again she asked herself, what could prevent him from answering such an appeal? Even supposing him to be ill, a friend or servant might in a case of such extremity, be deputed to inform her of the reason. Another letter from Miss Bellenden's cousin announced that he had again proceeded to William's hotel to receive some more satisfactory answer, but he was gone, having paid his landlord and dismissed his servants. Mirabel too was absent; and the writer, still believing that the interest was on the side of Miss Bellenden, once more urged his fair relative to waste no more thought upon one whose affections were transferred to a woman that in no way resembled her. A lingering hope that William might be on his way to England supported Blanch for a short time longer, and then she fell into a gloomy, silent despair that quenched the light of her eye, and withered the bloom on her young cheek.

Lord Dalmaine watched with anxiety and

surprise the melancholy appearance of her he loved sincerely, and every day strengthened him in the conviction that some mystery hung over her. The possibility of a previous attachment, had frequently occurred to him, but Sir Philip had denied it positively, and he also was himself inclined to argue that such could not be the case. The natural effect of time would be to diminish the melancholy of disappointed affection, whereas, her gloom seemed to augment every day. He longed to come to an open understanding with Blanch herself, but was bound by his promise to Sir Philip.

Lady Courtenay in the mean while, was not an unconcerned spectator; the sight of her daughter awakened a sensation of remorse, which required all her husband's influence to pacify. He urged her to be passive for the present, to leave every thing as it was. "This is the moment," he said, "of struggle; when Blanch is convinced; when it is over, and her eyes are opened, she will then perceive the real path to happiness."

Blanch followed her parents mechanically in public, but the knowledge that the abstrac-

tion of her manner, and the change of her appearance, were universally remarked, added bitterness to her cup. She was too miserable for confidence, and even while she regarded Miss Bellenden with friendship and gratitude, she felt no inclination to reveal the secret that weighed upon her heart. Solitude was her only ambition; to be alone, she rose early and retired late. Sleep no longer lavished its blessings on her head, and yet the hour of night was the one to which she looked, when another day was passed, and she might retreat from the society that was now insufferable to her.

It is night that belongs to the mourner;—night, whose silent attributes bear the stamp, at least, of calm; and whose darkness assimilates with the complexion of the mind's atmosphere. The strings of the heart, which during the long and weary day, have been subject to the tension of the world's custom, and taught to echo faintly the sounds of gaiety, in that hour are once more slackened, and hang in listless relaxation under the influence of sorrow.

Poor Blanch would sit gazing upon the

portrait of his mother, upon the drawings, upon the books, upon the ring which he had given her. They were the same, no difference could be traced in these inanimate pledges, but he who had given them, alas! what had he become? When time, change, or absence has raised its barrier between us and our heart's best treasure, there is something peculiarly melancholy in the gift that was bestowed, when we were together in every acceptation of the word. Like the wreath of evergreens with which the mourner decks some hallowed grave, its unaltered aspect is the very circumstance that reminds us most forcibly of the bitter change, which has occurred in our own fate.

At intervals, Blanch's spirit would rise within her, and clasping her hands together, she would call on William to answer for the grief that he had caused her, while the possibility of the ridicule which her rival might cast upon the fruitless constancy which her father assured her had become a common topic of discourse, was insupportable to her crushed and wounded heart.

CHAPTER XII.

THERE is a pitch of mental absorption to which we may arrive under the arbitrary dominion of joy or sorrow that renders us, for the time, independent of all external influence which is unconnected with the one subject of our reflections. Engrossed with the melancholy struggle of her own heart, it mattered little to Blanch what aspect the society by which she was surrounded bore. Had she been blessed with a home where her sorrows were only known to be shared, her doubts only divined to be soothed and pacified, then might she have found consolation in domestic quiet; but Blanch had always a part to play, and she, alas! found it at the same time more difficult and more ne-

cessary to enact the character at home, than abroad, for Sir Philip watched her with cruel vigilance, and whenever she sought refuge in silence, or that her features exhibited more than usual melancholy, he invariably found means to disguise some galling allusion in commonplace terms, so that it might be understood by her only, who was sensibly alive to every wound he inflicted. She was even now denied the comfort of being alone ; for Lady Courtenay, by her husband's suggestions, was continually breaking in upon that solitude which had hitherto proved the greatest relief to Blanch's harassed mind ; and under these circumstances she found herself more at liberty in the midst of a crowd, though even here, the constant presence of Lord Dalmaine distressed her. It was about this time that an incident occurred which occasioned no slight degree of excitement within the palace-walls. Two young relatives of his majesty were on a visit to their august kinsman, and during their sojourn at Hampton Court, Lord Dalmaine was appointed as their escort and guide, an office for which

he was well calculated, and which he performed to the satisfaction of the royal youths, who were not a little interested in the numerous historical anecdotes with which the young nobleman illustrated his description of the old palace. The audience-hall attracted their particular attention, and became doubly interesting on Lord Dalmaine's mentioning that some of Shakspeare's most admired productions had been represented there for the first time. This led to a discussion upon the drama and the merits of the apartment when considered as a theatre, which was followed by a respectful suggestion to his majesty, and concluded by his authorizing the young nobleman to fit up the hall immediately and engage an eminent company of players.

The day was fixed, and under the management of the enthusiastic Dalmaine every thing was ready at the appointed time. He looked forward to the hour with joy, for he had lately been unavoidably separated from Blanch, but this evening he determined to enjoy the meed of his labours by her side.

At the given hour the guests were all as-

sembled, and the doors at the end of the hall being thrown open, George the First attended by his household entered the theatre and ascended the throne amid the loyal acclamations of his subjects. The foreign princes sat on his right hand, and the officers of state, with their wives and daughters, took their respective stations near the king. A hasty description of a scene which history has not disdained to commemorate, may not be ill-placed in this narrative. The throne and canopy were of the same costly velvet as decorated several compartments of the walls, while innumerable lamps were cunningly introduced into the rich fretwork of the ceiling. The procenium was fully illuminated, and the oriel window where Surrey and his fair Geraldine were said to have held sweet converse, was studded with lamps that gave the appearance of stained glass to the panes, while the body of the theatre received no light excepting from above. On one side a gallery hung with tapestry and damask of gorgeous colours, was filled with ladies in full court attire, some of whom were both young

and beautiful. The musicians were concealed, and immediately before the stage there was an open space, designed, as Lord Dalmaine expressed it, to separate the real from the ideal world. Ensconced in the recess of the oriel window by the side of Blanch, and proud in the anticipation of the pleasure which would be afforded her, he only wished that the countenance of her he loved would lose that melancholy which surprised while it alarmed him.

At length the music commenced, and every voice was hushed, as the curtain rose slowly; while Blanch, turning to her companion, with an air of indifference inquired, for the first time, what he had selected for that night's representation.

"His majesty," replied Dalmaine, "having left the choice to me, I thought it best to open the theatre with the magnificent tragedy of Henry the Eighth, in consideration of the principal character having been the original founder of these walls."

The beauty of the language, the superiority of the acting, and the novelty of the whole, did not fail to excite Blanch's admiration, and she occasionally expressed her opinions on the subject to Lord Dalmaine, who, notwithstanding, experienced much disappointment at the total absence of that enthusiasm which he expected. But as the play advanced, and the matchless character of Queen Katherine was powerfully and feelingly sustained by a woman who looked and played the part to perfection, then gradually and insensibly Blanch's feelings were awakened, while her sorrow owned a sympathy with that of the unfortunate queen. She listened with earnest admiration to the beautiful, dignified, and feminine defence which Katherine offered to her oppressors: her heart swelled with indignation as she heard the vows which the inconstant Henry breathed in the ear of Anne Boleyn; but when the affecting interview between the abandoned queen and the cardinals took place, Blanch could no longer restrain her emotion. Echoing the words of the

actress in a low, but emphatic voice, she exclaimed,

“He has my heart yet, and shall have my prayers

While I shall have my life:”

Lord Dalmaine heard her! He had watched every shade that had passed over her features; he had remarked every passage that excited her interest; and suspicion forced itself upon his mind:—she loved another! Sir Philip had compelled or persuaded her to accept him: and yet—how could that be, when he recalled the affection which her father’s language had displayed? He could not speak: indeed he knew not what to say. But suddenly he was attracted by her unusual agitation, which at this moment could have no affinity with the scene then acting, for it was inferior both in interest and representation; and yet Blanch trembled!

He bent forward to see if she were ill, and perceived that her eyes were rivetted on the opposite corner of the room. There stood a man of an extraordinary appearance; his dress, which was black, was of a style totally opposed

to the fashion of the day, the peculiarity of which, combined with his enormous stature, rendered him the most conspicuous object in the room. He leaned against the door by which the court had entered; no one appeared to know or speak to him, and yet he was allowed to remain in that position, although two yeomen of the guard were stationed at the entrance. There were a few whispers and a few glances, which were quickly suppressed by his majesty's turning inquiringly in that direction.

The stranger's eyes, however, were fixed upon Blanch Courtenay with an indescribable expression, which none but that eye, peculiar and extraordinary as it was, could assume.

It appeared to Lord Dalmaine that the unknown was a man between fifty and sixty; his hair and beard, which were worn in the fashion of Henry the Fourth of France, were nearly gray, and his broad forehead showed many furrows: but his eye had forgotten to grow old; it had resisted the power of time, and remained unaltered amid surrounding changes.

As he gazed, Lord Dalmaine fancied that the

stranger made a sign to Blanch, and unable to contain himself any longer, he inquired abruptly, if she could inform him who it was that stood opposite.

Blanch looked embarrassed, but her negative was decided, and her lover's heart sank within him, for he believed that her answer was a falsehood.

"His attention to yourself," he observed, sharply, "appeared to be authorized by old acquaintance; but perhaps he requires to be admonished on some points of etiquette, and informed that it is not the custom in England, to fix his gaze upon one lady for so long a time together. By Heavens!" he cried, starting up as he spoke, for the curtain had now fallen, and the court was already on the move, "by Heavens! I will teach him that such insolence is not to be tolerated."

"My lord," said Blanch, laying her hand upon his arm, and speaking earnestly, "I must request you will not subject me to ridicule on so trifling a cause; the stranger may assert that his observation was directed to the window in

which I sat—to the person next me, and a thousand other excuses, which it would be impossible to refute.”

“He dare not,” replied Dalmaine. “At this very moment his eyes are fixed upon you. I will not brook such insolent conduct.”

“Lord Dalmaine,” rejoined Blanch, “I must request that you will not act in direct opposition to my wishes, in an affair that concerns me alone.”

“Miss Courtenay,” replied her companion, in a tone of wounded feeling, “you shall be obeyed; and as this affair concerns yourself alone, I will not take upon myself to chastise an insolence that is, apparently, agreeable to you.”

He bowed haughtily, and advanced towards the king, who was now bidding Sir Philip and Lady Courtenay good night. In order to reach their apartments sooner, they had to cross the hall, and descend by the large staircase which connects the two principal courts, and was the common egress for the guests in general. A few moments passed in compliments and congratulations with different people, and when

Dalmaine next turned his head, he perceived the Courtenays traversing the hall, closely followed by the mysterious stranger. Enraged beyond measure, he determined to pursue them; but, at that moment, the chamberlain stepped forward, and informed him that the king was inquiring for Lord Dalmaine. George the First linked his arm in that of the young courtier, and commencing a discussion on the entertainment, carried him off captive through the private entrance.

Blanch, in the mean time, contrived to keep the stranger in view until she reached the door. Here the crowd was too great; but, as she descended the staircase, she felt a gentle touch upon her arm, and, turning round, she heard her name pronounced by a low deep voice, but so distinct in all its tones, that not a word escaped her ear.

“Blanch Courtenay,” it said, “if William Clifford be still dear to you, meet me to-morrow night, by ten o’clock, at the end of the Lime Grove, near the river.”

“Blanch, are you coming, my love,” said

Lady Courtenay. "See, Philip, there is the man I spoke of, just behind her. Do tell me who he is, and why he was admitted in that mysterious manner."

"My dear Catherine," replied her husband, laughing with an air of importance and secrecy, "you had better try and examine Walpole on the subject: how he got here I don't believe any of them could tell; and why his majesty's ministry think proper to be so vastly civil to him, is, of course, only known to themselves—though we, humble individuals, may have our own ideas upon the subject."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE whole of the next day was passed by Blanch in a state of anxious excitement,—not of hesitation, for she was resolved at all hazards to meet a man who adjured her by a name so dear. She dreaded, nevertheless, the obstacles which would in all probability present themselves. But all, on the contrary, appeared to further her designs: her father dined with the king; and Lady Courtenay, fatigued by the exertions of the preceding evening, retired early to rest. Shortly after, Blanch stole to her own apartment, and throwing over her head one of those black silk hoods which were then so generally worn, and were not unfavourable to disguise; she descended the stairs with a noiseless tread. Passing through the gloomy and dimly-lighted cloisters, she trembled at

every step, and started at her own shadow, even though well aware that most of the inhabitants were at that moment in attendance on the king, and at all events there were few likely to be abroad at so late an hour on a winter's night. There was a severe struggle in her bosom, however. She knew that in the eyes of the world—even of the merciful portion—such a proceeding would be condemned. She shuddered to think of the construction that might be put on her conduct; and yet, in her own opinion, duty on this occasion pointed the same way as inclination. Hope, too, the guide of all beings, whose persuasive eloquence is so rarely resisted, was busy with a thousand suggestions, which Blanch endeavoured to silence, but in vain, and quitting the palace, she paused a moment to gaze on the scene before her.

The gardens had ever been her frequent resort, but when glittering and brilliant in the noonday sun, or glowing with the warm and mellow tints he bequeathed at his setting, they never appeared so beautiful, so fairy-like, to Blanch, as beneath the influence of a moonlight sky.

There was something, indeed, both in their forms and their colouring, particularly adapted to this sweet and “stilly hour.” The fantastic outline of the evergreens traced in dark relief upon the sky, lent themselves to many a vague and poetic dream, in which fancy loves to indulge, while the liquid music of the fountains fell soothingly upon the ear. The water springing upwards, caught the moonbeams as they fell, tossing them to and fro in familiar sport, and scattering their broken lustre over the whole of the little basin. On one side rose the dark pile of the building, throwing its deep shadow on the broad terrace; and on the other, the boundary of high trees, which even at this season, when stripped of their verdure, added to the beauty of the general effect. Here and there too, under the shade of some mournful yew, the pure white urn, of graceful workmanship, caught the eye, looking like the peaceful grave of the departed. But one of the peculiar characteristics of the spot, was that night remarkable — its summer-like aspect. That bright season might deck it with those lovely superfluities, of which it would be in turn dis-

sessed by winter ; but on a bright and genial day, as the eye dwelt upon the luxuriant grass, and ever-verdant laurel and yew which adorn the border, it would not have been difficult to have cheated oneself into the sweet belief, that summer was still lingering in a spot so beautiful.

The absence of those lovely songs, which had charmed Blanch in her earlier walks, and the chilliness of the air, alone reminded her that the sweet season had passed away. The notes of the nightingale were exchanged for the shrill hooting of the owl, which, together with the baying of a watch-dog, and the measured tread of the sentinels, alone broke the stillness of the night.

Blanch stood gazing for a moment on the fountain, with her mind agitated by a thousand conflicting and opposite feelings, till the mellow tones of the palace clock, echoed by the bells of the neighbouring village, warned her that the hour of rendezvous was arrived. Traversing the grass parterre, she entered the lime avenue, and found the stranger standing on the appointed spot.

“ I am come,” she began, “ according to your

summons, but before I can listen to one word, you must prove that I am not mistaken in my conjectures, by revealing your name."

"The name of Dumont," he replied, "is not unfamiliar to you, at least if I have been rightly informed on the subject."

"M. Dumont!" exclaimed Blanch, with a quiet earnestness that at once convinced her companion of the depth of feeling which dictated every word. "Since the time that I left Bordeaux, sorrow, doubt, and disappointment, have been my portion; and at the moment that I most need advice and consolation, there is no one to afford me either. The melancholy situation in which I am placed alone induces me to hazard a step that, if discovered, would expose me to undoubted censure. We have never met before, but one, on whose word I loved to place implicit reliance, made you known to me. I appeal to your honour, to your generosity,—you are dealing with a young and inexperienced woman, whose conduct must, and whose destiny may, depend upon your answer. Let that answer be dictated by the strictest veracity, let

neither compassion for me, nor friendship for another, lead you to withhold any part of the truth. Tell me," she added, gazing earnestly in his face, while the hope against which she struggled cast a momentary beam over her features, "Tell me, if I must learn from his example, to forget—tell me if I must teach myself the hard and bitter task, to consider William Clifford unworthy of my love?"

She bent forward anxiously, eagerly, she endeavoured to anticipate his answer, for every second appeared an hour.

"Rather," replied Dumont, "consider him as a redeeming instance, in this world of falsehood—as one who has staked life and fortune in the cause of friendship—and who, surrounded by all that could captivate and inthral the heart of man, has never wandered, even in thought, from that vow which he breathed to Blanch Courtenay, before the voice of a designing world had taught her to question and mistrust the actions of William Clifford!"

Oh! for words to express the ecstasy with which she listened—the implicit faith which she

placed in Dumont's assertion. Blanch had heard the most conclusive evidence from Stanley; she had read a repetition of the intelligence, in Miss Bellenden's letters; and yet an assertion from the lips of a stranger, without proof, without explanation, had the power to produce instant conviction. Fond, but blessed credulity, she shared Dumont's indignation, though she herself was its object, and thanked him in her heart for the reproof his speech implied. "Oh! repeat those words," she said, "that I may live over again the last few moments. I did not know, indeed, I did not know that such rapture was in store for me. But let me not interrupt you; set my mind at rest—my heart is nearly so already."

"Lady," said Dumont, "I scarcely wonder that your life should be one of disappointment, if you give such prompt credence to the most opposite assertions; but I, at least, will not deceive you. The detail of William Clifford's adventures in Paris, would be too long for me to give, were I willing to deprive him of the pleasure he will experience in relating them

himself. With the blessing of Heaven his arrival will be speedy; but, as you demand the whole truth, it is incumbent on me to inform you, that the dangers and difficulties in which he has lately been involved, are not yet at an end, and there is still a possibility of delay."

Blanch looked up, and Dumont hastened to reply to her tacit inquiries. "I scarcely know how to tell you that my deliverance is owing to William Clifford, who remained in the dungeon, which the residence of a few weeks longer would have converted into my tomb. Do me the justice to believe, that I would never have consented to this plan, had I not been convinced of the practicability of his escape. Should the scheme which we concerted together fail, he has a friend at court, who will risk every thing to save him;—and, I need scarcely tell you that, in the last extremity, they will willingly accept the exchange that I shall offer in my own person."

"But the suspense!" exclaimed Blanch, her voice faltering as she spoke, "when shall we know how it has ended?"

“Soon,” replied her companion; “many days will not elapse before I hear from one to whom William’s safety is as dear as to you or to myself.”

There was a pause; and Blanch knew not how to clothe the inquiry which she longed to make.

“This friend at court,” she began, “is then deeply interested in William’s fate?”

Dumont bent his searching eye upon her.

“You have heard,” he said, “of Mirabel de Bernay?”

“Yes,” replied Blanch, with much embarrassment; “I have heard of her as one whom the virtuous do not love.”

As she uttered these words, Dumont’s countenance assumed a sternness that almost amounted to passion. His brow knit, and his eye rolled:—

“Cursed!” he cried, “be those who invented so gross a calumny against the best and noblest of her sex—the pure, the noble, the high-minded Mirabel! When will the vile and worthless refrain from slandering that virtue and excellence of which they are incapable? If

to watch over the safety of others—if to surmount the cowardice of her sex, and hazard all she values in the cause of benevolence—if to sacrifice every interested and selfish feeling for the sake of one she loves—if this be guilt, then is Mirabel de Bernay most culpable ! Yet stay: she has committed another error ; one that the pride of woman will not pass lightly over : she has stooped to love—to centre the affections of her whole heart on William Clifford. But do not wrong her : that love is as pure, and holy, though not so blest, as yours. And mark me, Blanch Courtenay, this woman, of whom you thought so lightly, from the day that every hope of her young heart was crushed by the discovery of William's attachment to another—from that very day, the whole energy of her noble nature was exerted against her own interests. Day by day, and hour by hour, did Mirabel work unceasingly to restore William to her rival. And even while rejoicing in his presence, she scorned to exercise that influence which her beauty, her talents, and her devoted affection might have acquired over the heart of any human being.

“ I distress you,” he added, after a pause ; “ I have spoken harshly, perhaps, and beg your forgiveness ; but the necessity of vindicating those two, whom I esteem the most on earth, appears so strange—so—”

“ Oh, no ! ” interrupted Blanch ; “ you have spoken well and nobly, and I alone have been to blame. Yet I knew not what to believe, or whom to trust. Alas ! alas ! my heart bleeds for her ! What consolation can there be in store for one whose situation is so melancholy ? ”

“ Much ! ” exclaimed Dumont, with calm enthusiasm ; “ much, in retrospection. The present—the future—must be blanks in her existence : but the glorious past !—it will remain a shining light, shedding its distant brightness over her otherwise sad and solitary path.”

There was another long pause, and Blanch reflecting that every moment was precious, and that she had still much to learn, inquired of Dumont, by what means he had discovered her in the crowd, on the preceding evening.

“ I might reply,” he said, “ by putting the same question to yourself. Nevertheless,” he

added, with a smile, "I have always found William's descriptions true to nature; but even had I no such guide, there was a circumstance which would instantly identify you in my eyes. Yesterday evening you wore a portrait studded with diamonds, on your bosom."

"I did so," she replied. "You may have perhaps seen it in William's possession; it is the picture of his mother."

"That miniature!" exclaimed Dumont, suppressing the emotion which these associations awakened, "was painted at my request; it was the pledge of one, who, as she gave it, renewed the vow, which, after the lapse of a few months, was repeated with shameless falsehood in the ear of another. You, who now possess it, who have read the inscription dictated by a false and ephemeral sentiment, which she dared to confound with that exalted passion of which her nature was incapable—you, I say, may blush to know, that one of your own sex, and the mother of William Clifford, should act so basely by a man whose whole heart was devoted to her from early youth. To you, Marguerite," he

cried, “ may every error, every misfortune of my after life be ascribed—to you whose falsehood drove me to seek forgetfulness in that wide world, whose promises, like your own, only dazzled to betray. Forgive me !” he added, turning towards Blanch. “ This is a subject on which I never speak—on which I have never spoken to William Clifford. The first evening of our acquaintance the resemblance struck me forcibly; and strange as it may appear, I felt an interest in the son of her whose memory is hateful to me. But it was his own superior qualities, and noble disposition, that cemented the friendship founded on so slight and unwarrantable a basis. I have never mentioned his mother’s name to William Clifford, but I have been told, ay, and I believe, and hope it, that her life was one of remorse, disappointment, and sorrow ! Your gentle nature,” he added, observing that Blanch was distressed by his violence, “ cannot compass the joy which such an intelligence awakened. Pardon me—I have been led to deviate from the original subject of our discourse, and yet, in

my mind, there exists much affinity between them."

He changed his tone and manner, he spoke once more cheerily of the prospect of Clifford's speedy arrival, and the reflection that her lover was, perhaps, at that moment in captivity, could hardly check the joyous overflowings of Blanch's heart. She thanked Dumont, she murmured a few words of faint apology for the tears she could no longer control.

Her companion watched her with kind interest. "I love to see a woman weep," he said, "when her tears flow from a pure and warrantable source—they must be sweet comforters, those bright drops that glisten in the moonlight. But this means of consolation, like almost every other, has ever been denied me!"

"Would," exclaimed Blanch, "that it lay in my power to reward you for all the consolation you have afforded me. Tell me, before I go, that you acquit me of all harshness towards that noble being, who is far, far more worthy than myself, to be beloved by William; and, above all, let me entreat you to remember that I rely on you alone for intelligence."

“Go, then,” said Dumont, “and trust to me; this suspense cannot last much longer.”

They parted hastily, for the clock now warned them of the lateness of the hour.

Blanch flew down the walk, but as she retraced her way over the grass, she heard the footsteps of a man on the terrace, and her heart beat quick and hard. She looked carefully from behind the screen of shrubs which encircle the grass parterres, to discover who it was, and, to her dismay, she recognised Dalmaine. The act of drawing back hastily attracted his attention—he crossed the border and stood by her side.

“This is a cold night, and a late hour,” he began in a tone that induced her to believe she was not yet discovered, “for a fair damsel to be walking forth unattended.”

She did not reply, except by drawing her hood more closely round her face, and quickening her pace towards the palace. But Lord Dalmaine was not so easily deterred from his purpose, and he continued.

“She who goes out alone, at this late hour,

to meet a man whom she saw yesterday for the first time, need not scruple to indulge such an old acquaintance as myself, with a few moments' conversation."

As he spoke, he placed himself before her path, and Blanch finding that any attempt at further concealment would be useless, replied at once:—

"Let me pass, Lord Dalmaine; another time I may justify my conduct, but this is not the moment or the place to do so."

"By Heavens! it shall be," he cried, eagerly, as he once more shifted his position to impede her progress. "Mark me well, any attempt to quit this spot, until you have accounted for being here, will prove fruitless."

"I do not merit such treatment," rejoined Blanch, in a tone of expostulation, "and must beg to remind you, that common courtesy should, at all times, be practised by a man to a woman, even though appearances may condemn her in his eyes."

"Not so," he replied, "when you give me, by conduct which I will leave your own heart

to name, so great an advantage, you can hardly expect me not to use it—and whatever be the consequence to you or me, I repeat, that you shall not leave this spot till this is explained.”

Thus saying, he laid his hand on her wrist, with less gentleness than was usual to him, and Blanch endeavoured to disengage it, but in vain. Alarmed and agitated as she was, the indignation which Dalmaine’s conduct excited, supported her.

“Release my hand, Lord Dalmaine!” she exclaimed, with dignity, “and tell me by what authority you pretend to question or control my actions?”

“Deceitful, heartless girl!” cried Dalmaine, without relaxing his grasp, “have I been made the sport of your vanity for so long a time, to be rewarded by insult and mockery at last? Have you the effrontery to speak in this manner, to one with whose affection you have so basely trifled?”

“As God is my witness!” she replied, with deep emotion, “I have never trifled with the affections of any human being upon earth.”

“Blanch Courtenay,” exclaimed her companion, leading her a few paces forward into the open moonlight, “answer me, if you have the slightest regard for that truth which you so often and so zealously uphold, what excuse can be found for the conduct of a woman whom, neither regard for herself, nor for him to whom she has plighted her vows, can withhold from going out, in the dead of night, to meet a man that, yesterday, she did not blush to affirm, was an utter stranger?”

“I am not surprised,” she replied, “that such a proceeding should incur your censure; but, as I have hitherto enjoyed your good opinion, let me entreat you, not only to suspend your judgment, but also to believe, that love for my future husband alone, prompted a step, which you would be the last to condemn, were I at liberty to divulge the circumstances connected with it.”

Dalmaine heard her with mingled sorrow and resentment—he released her hand. “Go,” he said, “I will detain you no longer than to express my gratitude to one who has undeceived me, before it was too late.”

His lip quivered; and in a tone of bitter irony he added, "Accept my best thanks for such an undoubted proof of affection—for that enthusiastic love which shows itself under a novel and eccentric form—"

"You wrong me, Lord Dalmaine," continued Blanch, whose suspicion of the truth had been suddenly roused by his last speech; "the day I was made acquainted with your sentiments, you were informed, by my desire, of an engagement which was contracted before I ever knew you, or became the object of an affection which I could not return. Yet believe me, there is no one, after him who occupies my heart, that I admire—that I esteem—as much as yourself—whose friendship is more precious, or whose kindness is more valued. Do not say I have trifled with you; do not believe that one who loves as I do, could be ungrateful, or regardless of your disinterested attachment—of your forgiving and generous nature."

She spoke with much feeling; but her words fell with a sad and melancholy sound on Dalmaine's ear. He was silent for a few seconds,

for the blow he had received was no slight one, while a thousand convincing circumstances forced themselves upon his mind, showing him that he had been deceived.

Alas ! how one word can destroy that fabric of hope and joy, in the construction of which so many bright and blessed moments have been passed ; and can scatter at our feet the ruins of that sweet imaginary future which fancy laid out for our after home—ruins that obtrude themselves on our view like the memory of the past, only to aggravate the sorrow of to-day.

“And whom,” Dalmaine at length inquired, “did you depute to inform me of your previous engagement ?”

“My father,” she replied, with a vague dread ; “my father, who bore your message to myself.”

“Blanch,” said her companion, “we have both been cruelly, shamefully deceived ; for I—I was led to believe you had accepted me !”

Blanch was silent, but the blood of her noble

race rose in her veins, as the fact of her father's falsehood flashed suddenly upon her.

"And my mother?" she inquired, hesitatingly.

"And your mother—she also lent herself to this infamous deception!"

"Then," cried the agitated girl, "then I am indeed friendless and forsaken!"

"Do not say so, Blanch," replied Dalmaine, sadly; "I will be your friend and protector, until he who has a right to be both, arrives to claim you. Let there no longer be any mystery between us. If your natural supporters fail, confide in me, and you shall never have cause to repent it. Miserable as this intelligence has made me, it is a consolation to think that I have not been deceived in you.—Do not weep so bitterly, dearest Blanch," he added tenderly; "if I am not blest enough to add to your happiness, do not let me believe I have caused you any sorrow. Lean on me, and we will return to your home. You tremble sadly—I feel your tears falling on my hand. Fear no-

thing, Blanch : my promise of protection was not lightly given."

They walked on in silence.

"May God bless you!" exclaimed the weeping Blanch, as she took leave of Dalmaine at the foot of her turret staircase. "May God bless you! and oh, may he reward you for this noble conduct."

CHAPTER XIV.

DURING the course of the next day, Blanch found means to converse at length with Dalmaine, whom she referred, for every particular, to Dumont, after having explained, in a few words, the circumstances which connected him so intimately with her betrothed husband. She intrusted Dalmaine with some hasty lines for the stranger, entreating his unlimited confidence for the bearer. Dalmaine's noble and candid deportment, the unpretending manner in which he proffered his assistance, and the generous and kind-hearted language he held with regard to Blanch, produced its natural effect upon the mind of Dumont. He withheld nothing that might excite the young nobleman's

interest, and letting him further into the secret than Blanch herself, obtained a promise that he would exert his personal influence with the king to obtain the restoration of the Clifford estates.

It might be about two days after the adventure in the garden, that Sir Philip Courtenay took his accustomed way towards the king's writing-closet. He was, however, checked in his progress, and requested, by the page, to await his majesty's commands in the antechamber. This he did for some time, very patiently walking up and down, examining every picture in the room, observing the hanging of the curtains, and taking a careful survey of the grounds from the window, till, wearied by expectation, he at length fell into a deep train of thought, chiefly upon domestic concerns, wondering how much longer Blanch's patience would hold out, and lulling himself into the belief that his plan would prove successful in the end.

He looked at his watch—three quarters of an hour had elapsed!—the door opened, and the mysterious stranger, whose appearance at the

theatre had caused such a sensation, entered the room. Sir Philip considered this, however, as a fortunate incident, and approaching the unknown with a bland smile, had already prepared some flattering speech; when, to his surprise, the door of his majesty's closet was opened, and the stranger, with a slight inclination of the head, passed on, without remark or observation, into the royal presence.

Sir Philip's meditations took a new turn, and he felt that unpleasing sensation which the busy and the curious ever experience when any event is in agitation, without the possibility of their interference. Another long quarter of an hour passed, and Lord Dalmaine entered the room; Courtenay received him with easy familiarity, but the young man's demeanour was cold, distant, and haughty; and in a few moments he also received a summons from his majesty.

Sir Philip's vexation was now at its height; that a private audience should be granted to the foreigner was not extraordinary, but why so young a man as Dalmaine, one who had never

taken a leading part in politics, why he should be admitted to the conference, was indeed incomprehensible. A vague dread of having in some involuntary manner, forfeited the king's good will, startled Sir Philip as it rose before him, and indeed his suspicions appeared confirmed by Dalmaine's manner, which, judging from his own feelings, was peculiarly adapted to those whose favour was on the decline. Added to these pleasurable reflections, the baronet's curiosity was wrought to a pitch of irritability, while the conference in the next room was carried on in a most tantalising tone of voice. He fancied he could detect when the discourse took an explanatory or persuasive turn, but not a word reached his ear. At length he heard the chairs pushed aside, he heard steps advancing, and a hand laid upon the lock of the door, then a fine clear voice uttered these words, to which Courtenay listened in breathless anxiety.

“ I receive your majesty's promise as an indemnification for all I may have done and suffered. Henceforth I mingle no more in this

world's politics. I leave a scene where I have acted a busy and a painful part, but with one great satisfaction : I have found friendship in one man, and generosity in another, and above all, I have found gratitude, even in a monarch."

The door opened, and the foreigner, followed by Dalmaine, passed through the room, slightly acknowledging Sir Philip as they did so. To crown the baronet's mortification, the page informed him, in their hearing, that his majesty could not admit any one else during the remainder of the day. Disappointed and crest-fallen, Sir Philip returned to his own apartments, and as he did so, beheld the two others walking arm in arm, engaged in a most animated discussion.

* * * * *

Leaving Sir Philip to digest his vexation at leisure, we must not only transport the reader once more to the shores of France, but even lead him back to the memorable day of Dumont's escape.

The shades of evening had already invested the earth, but darkness, utter darkness, had for

some hours filled the solitary dungeon in which William Clifford was confined. His native daring and sanguine temperament had effectually sustained him, during the period of suspense which intervened from the departure of Dumont, till the appointed moment when the second escape was to be attempted. But when the struggle was over, when the cries of the gaoler brought several comrades to his assistance, and Clifford, though striving for a moment with all the courage of despair, was overpowered by numbers—when bound by the heaviest fetters which that abode of oppression afforded, and with his arms tightly pinioned, he was dragged from the cell which Dumont had occupied, and thrust into a lower and a smaller dungeon, there to remain until the regent's pleasure should be known—then did he, indeed, experience sensations hitherto totally unfamiliar to him. He stood in utter darkness,—but what was darkness to him, save that the moments appeared to crawl more heavily in the absence of all light, and that every moment, as it passed, brought a fresh pang to his heart?

His plan had failed—that plan on which every thing had been staked; and the discovery had been so speedy, that, in all probability, Dumont himself would not escape detection. Blanch! his faithful Blanch, too, who was at that moment braving her father's wrath for his sake—Blanch! who would know that her letter had been delivered, and would attribute his silence to a different cause—might she not be driven at length to listen to the suit of another, and obey her father, and avenge what she might well consider her slighted love, at the same moment? And Mirabel! The reflections connected with her were doubly bitter, for regret was mingled with apprehension on her account. He reproached himself for not having sufficiently exerted the influence he possessed, by engaging her to provide for her own safety in the manner he had at first proposed. Yet a single moment's consideration might have convinced him that the attempt would have been unsuccessful, however frequently, and however pressingly, it had been urged. But his mind was in no state to reason

clearly. William knew her well indeed, but that knowledge alarmed him the more. Had her resolution been weaker, her affection less firm, the first impulse, at least, might have been to ensure her own pardon; but could William have overheard every syllable that had passed between her and the regent, his judgment of her conduct could not have been more correct.

He foresaw every thing, indeed, that was painful. He felt convinced that the Duke of Orleans would not lose that opportunity to visit her pride severely upon her head. He dreaded to think of the ordeal to which her high spirit and her noble heart would be subjected; and, above all, he shuddered at the thought that the intensity of her grief might betray that secret which she had so long and so carefully concealed, and expose her to the scorn of a depraved prince and a libertine court. How those feelings, naturally liable to excitement, would stand such fearful trials, he could not picture to himself; but one thing at least was certain, Mirabel de Bernay could never be inactive at such a moment, and any exertion on

her part, he saw but too clearly, would, in all probability, prove fatal to both. Whichever way he turned to look, misery to himself and those he loved best met his eyes. Every thing was despair! The thought of speedy death to one for whom life still possessed every charm, was not rendered more grateful by the reflection that that death would be ignominious—if such a term could ever be applied to the death of the noble and the good. But no! the block, the axe, the headsman, the gaping multitude, are but mere accessories; it is the inward feeling that makes the hero, even though chance may rob his name of the glory which it merits.

The scaffold! How many instances are there upon record where those, whom tyranny and oppression have selected as their victims, have made the scaffold as brilliant a field for intrepidity, as that on which the warrior breathes his last, with the shout of victory in his dying ear, and the laurels of fame already descending upon his chilly brow! But Clifford could not argue thus. If he died, he died in a

private cause, without any of those stirring incidents which would ensure his name an honourable place upon the page of history. Far from it—he well knew there was no one in the world beside Dumont who would regard, in a favourable light, the sacrifice he had made. If he died, would not his very memory be hateful to Blanch—would she not say, with truth, under the very best view of the case—that love had been subservient to friendship; that the life of Dumont had been more precious in his sight than the happiness he professed to covet? And the report of his attachment to Mirabel, which must have reached her—what must be the stain it would leave upon his memory in her eyes? Who could then undeceive her—who then convince her that William's heart had never faltered in its truth? Death, merely as death, Clifford feared as little as any man, but that which was in store for him, was not calculated to raise any feelings but those of disgust within his mind.

We mourn the fate of those, who at an early

age, are borne to the tomb by some fatal disease, just at the period, when life wears its most promising colours ; but the progressive decay of the frame, the kind and soothing attentions of those who surround the dying bed, all conduce to the gradual resignation of the mind, and the preparation of the soul for its departure. Not so the sudden doom, the sentence pronounced by a fellow mortal, which in an instant snaps asunder the myriad ties that bind us to life, in the spring of youth and vigour. Clifford believed that in the eyes of heaven the deed he had done would prove acceptable ; he had beheld the victim of injustice (for such had he ever considered Dumont) a being whom he loved, and honoured, sinking beneath the horrors of prolonged captivity, and he had stretched out a hand to save him ; but in the disturbed state of his mind, even the consciousness of having acted nobly, could not sustain him. Philosophy, nay the only true, the only lovely philosophy ; that religion to which Clifford had ever had recourse in former trials, seemed now to forsake him. There was

a heavy lassitude upon him, an entire depression, his heart had lost its buoyancy, his spirit its elasticity. The excitement he had undergone, the failure of his long cherished scheme, the disappointment, the extinction of all his hopes, every thing combined to weigh him down, to overpower him, to prostrate soul and body. After standing for more than an hour in contemplation, if that could be called contemplation, which was agony and confusion; he resolved to walk across the dungeon to a spot where the light of the gaoler's lantern had shown him a stone seat, but he forgot how he was bound. The chain round his ancles was too short to admit the usual free movement of his limbs, and as he attempted to advance, he fell, dashing his head against the stone pavement. He struggled up and seated himself on the block of stone, which had borne many of his unhappy predecessors, but bodily pain was now added to mental anguish, his head swam and he fell fainting on the floor of the dungeon.

How long a time had elapsed he had not the remotest idea, when the sounds of footsteps,

and the withdrawing of bolts recalled him to consciousness. Clifford required no other incentive to exertion, than the knowledge of the satisfaction which his oppressors would derive from the sight of his despair. He rose with difficulty, and prepared to meet the person who was about to enter with composure. There was a charm indeed in the rusty grinding of the bolts, for in Clifford's eyes, any event would be preferable to the dreadful time he had lately passed. Still it was an awful moment, for death and torture might tread upon the heels of those who were now entering.

CHAPTER XV.

THE door was at length opened, and two gaolers entered, the first of whom bore a lantern, with which he scrutinized the prisoner's countenance for a moment, and then bade him follow. William had of course neither the power nor the inclination to disobey; and after threading innumerable passages, he found himself in a large square room, which was set apart for the examination of prisoners. The governor was pacing up and down, with a far different expression from the smiling urbanity with which he had greeted the Baronne de Bernay at the gate of the chateau. On the other side, with some show of state, was seated one of those officers of law, or petty

judges, termed the *maîtres de requêtes*. Behind a small table sat his secretary; and beside him the witnesses, some of whom bore evident marks of Clifford's resistance. The man of law's countenance was shrewd and fierce, and it brightened on the entrance of the young Englishman, as if in anticipation of pleasure of some kind to be derived from the exercise of his functions. He gazed steadily upon the prisoner for a moment or two, and then, with a stern and contracted brow, he said,

“It is needless to inform you of the cause for which you are summoned, or of the charge which is now preferred against you. The providential discovery of the base and hateful conspiracy, in which you have so long been implicated, the failure of the ill-conceived and ill-executed scheme, which, in conjunction with others——” he paused, and repeated the word, throwing a strong emphasis into his tone,—“others, whose peculiar position should have deterred from treasonable practices:—the failure, as I before observed, of your mutual

scheme, has this day subjected both of you to the extreme penalty of the law; and his highness, whose name is synonymous with justice and equity! has invested me with full power to examine into the motives which prompted you to so flagrant a breach of those duties you necessarily owe to the country in which you reside. The Duke of Orleans, whose clemency you have already reason to know is ever willing to afford opportunity for defence and exculpation, nevertheless, has commanded me to inform you, that the slightest deviation from a faithful statement of facts, the slightest attempt at withholding one particle of the truth, will not only draw down upon you the speedy execution of the ultimate punishment assigned by law to such offences, but may beforehand lead to that terrible and ignominious, but necessary means of extracting the truth."

He dropped his voice, as if his own mind were filled with a painful sensation of awe, at the allusion to the torture which he was forced to make, but William's features, according to

the command which he had imposed on them, betrayed not the shadow of a change. It was indeed wonderful how his ever-varying countenance could assume, for so long a time, a character of cold and calm indifference. He listened attentively, but with perfect tranquillity; and his demeanour could never have led any one to divine the subject of the discourse to which he gave ear.

The speaker, whose aim was evidently by one means or another to inspire an awe that verged upon terror, was disappointed at the small effect his words produced upon the prisoner.

“Advance!” he said, raising his tone. “You are accused of having aided and abetted the escape of one of the principal prisoners of state, with whom you have been in constant, though clandestine correspondence, for several months past. Indeed, since the autumn of last year, at Bordeaux, when under the lax and unwarrantable government of the late General de Brissac, you were admitted to constant interviews with the prisoner called Du-

mont, you there, it is proved, commenced that system of treasonable communication which you have since carried on in Paris. Taking advantage of the generous hospitality of the royal family, you have most dishonourably played the spy upon their words and actions, and conveyed to the prisoner in Vincennes, those details which might conduce to the success of his treasonable purposes."

The maître de requêtes paused, after having thus announced to Clifford the charge against him; and, leaning back in his chair, he fixed his keen and searching eyes upon the prisoner, inquiring if he had any thing to reply?

"Undoubtedly," said William, with perfect composure, "by asserting that the statement you have made is totally without foundation!" The magistrate shook his head, and wished from his heart, the prisoner might be able to prove it clearly. He then proceeded, however, to recapitulate the accounts which he had received from the governor, gaolers, and sentinels, of the first visit which William had paid, in company with the Baronne de Bernay; and

the second, which had terminated in the escape of Dumont, and the detention of Clifford, to whom he once more applied for an explanation of the separate motives, which induced the baronne and himself to be guilty of an act of treason.

“ I have made up my mind,” replied Clifford, with quiet firmness, “ not to reply to another question that is proposed. There are some facts of which you are in possession, and the appearance of the witnesses may be said to corroborate one part at least, of the accusation ; but, as to the motives which actuated me, or the means by which I entered the prison, my intention is to maintain a silence that neither argument, entreaty, nor menace, can ever induce me to break !”

This indeed was the course which, from the first moment of reflection, William had determined to pursue. Entirely ignorant of all that had passed with regard to Mirabel, he judged that any interest he displayed in her behalf, any chance word that he might drop, even in

his anxiety to exculpate her, might prove a means, in the hands of his judges, for the ruin of both. Convinced, at the same time, that in one way or another, her energies would be exerted for herself and him, he dreaded by any rash admission, or denial, to overturn any system of policy which she might have found practicable on the occasion. He well knew how expert the French lawyers had ever proved themselves in entangling and perplexing their victims ; and in silence he believed there was the best, the only safeguard against their snares. He was not blind to the probable and terrible consequences ; yet (the proceedings of Mirabel out of the question) there was at all events one subject on which he was resolved never to throw the faintest light, namely, the destination of Dumont ; and such a determination he well knew might be visited with the severest afflictions.

William Clifford was not a man to falter in the career which he had once commenced, and, endeavouring to banish from his mind those

harrowing and unnerving thoughts to which he had so lately been a prey, he now stood boldly forward to meet his fate.

No sooner had he concluded the last speech, than the magistrate glanced from him to the governor, with an air of astonishment, and even of compassion, which neither of those to whom the look was directed, perhaps, believed to be very sincere.

“Young man,” continued the judge, in a low, but distinct and impressive tone, “while there is yet time, do not sacrifice the chance of life to obstinacy and pride. That erring, but repentant creature, whose blind devotion instigated her to become an accomplice——”

William, with difficulty, suppressed the indignation which such a mention of Mirabel de Bernay excited; yet the momentary flash that burst from his eye was not lost upon any of his companions, and the judge proceeded.—

“The Baronne de Bernay, then, for it is needless any longer to conceal a name, alas! but too well known on this fatal occasion, has,

in a private interview granted her by the Duke of Orleans, fully acknowledged her part in the affair, given some clue to the route which the late prisoner was to pursue; confessed that it was owing to your subtlety alone that she was betrayed into a breach of that duty which she owes to her monarch and her country, and casting herself upon the duke's mercy, has obtained the promise of pardon, for which she so humbly sued. That pardon cannot, however, be ratified, or even secured in any way, until your testimony corroborates the facts which she has stated, and until you have, by your confession, disclosed others, which are even more essential. The course which the baronne has pursued is open to you, it may possibly be attended with like success; and the first step towards such a proceeding, is to point out clearly the spot in which the late prisoner lies concealed. My secretary will transcribe your confession; and I myself will instantly return to Paris to inform the regent of your submission, and that you now rely, in

humble hope, upon the effects of his gracious clemency, and await the announcement of his royal pleasure."

"I thank you," replied William, coldly, "for the interest you profess in my behalf; but permit me to say that I doubt, nay, I will venture to contradict, the information you have received with regard to the Baronne de Bernay. Be this as it may, whatever steps that lady has thought fit to take in a matter that so little concerns her, cannot have the slightest influence over my proceedings; and I repeat, once more positively repeat, that I am resolved not to answer another question of any kind whatsoever."

"Not answer another question!" echoed the magistrate, sternly; "are you aware how many significations may be applied to that small word *question*? Question," he again repeated, in a bitter tone, "there are *some questions* which compel replies!" He looked Clifford full in the face as he spoke, while the gaoler and the witnesses exchanged several glances of intelligence. But at that moment the governor strode across the room, and whispered for an

instant to him, on whose word hung the fate of Clifford.

The governor was of no gentle nature. Accustomed for many years to sights of death and deeds of cruelty, and constrained, from the office which he held, to witness daily some dreadful scene, his heart became gradually callous; but he had been a soldier, and there still remained a latent spark of chivalrous feeling in his breast. The manly deportment of the young foreigner, when standing upon the brink of death and torture, had excited his earnest admiration, perhaps, because he fancied his own conduct would have been similar under the same circumstances. He watched Clifford with a vigilant eye; he saw, that the only word which touched him nearly was the name of the woman, whom he doubtless loved! He beheld him in the pride of youth, and saw, flashing out from his noble countenance, all those high feelings which ever find an echo in a soldier's heart. He pictured to himself the prisoner stretched upon the rack, enduring those pangs, of which description can furnish

no idea, and then borne away in the rude arms of the gaoler, with the powerful limbs, and majestic form, reduced to those of a mangled bleeding cripple. He had often witnessed such scenes as these with perfect composure; but he had never experienced a similar interest in any prisoner. The fascination which, under different forms, had at once won upon the regard of De Brissac, and Dumont, of Blanch, and of Mirabel, had worked its way to the obdurate heart of the governor of Vincennes. He conversed with the magistrate, in a low tone, for some moments, apparently urging, arguing, and even entreating, and at length he succeeded, for his companion rose, and, approaching Clifford, he said,

“In pursuance with the governor’s wishes, you are to be reconducted to your dungeon, there to remain for the space of three hours. During that time you will have opportunity for reflection; and let me earnestly recommend to your notice, that the consequences which must follow your present line of conduct are matter for no light consideration.”

He was then led back to his cell ; but a quarter of an hour had not elapsed before the governor again stood by his side, and with many an expression of interest, urged him to avert the fate that menaced him. Clifford was not insensible to the kindly feeling which the officer displayed, even while he resisted every argument in favour of confession. He thanked him warmly, gratefully ; he assured him that the knowledge of one human being's sympathy would strengthen him. He owned that the prospect of torture was almost unbearable ; but he believed, he trusted, that his conduct would not disgrace him in the dreadful trial. He inquired if it were probable that he would die under the infliction ; and earnestly entreated the governor, at all events, to claim possession of the ring which they had taken from his finger, and the broken chain and portrait, which had been concealed in his bosom.

“ Save them,” he said, “ from the hands of the executioner ; and if I die, let them be conveyed to the Baronne de Bernay, with my blessing, and my entreaty that those to whom

they originally belonged will keep them, and value them for my sake."

"You may trust me," replied the governor, feeling some embarrassment under the unusual part which he found himself enacting, "your wishes shall be complied with; and since," he added, with his hand upon the door, "since my advice is thrown away upon you, and that I fear there is no chance of your escaping, tell me if, in any other way compatible with my duty, I can further serve you." Clifford wrung his hand.

"I have but one more wish," he said; "Tell the Baronne de Bernay my memory is in her hands; tell her it is my wish, my last prayer, that she would go to England: she will understand me." He sighed. "I talk as if I were convinced of her safety," he added; "tell me, governor, only one word, do you believe the assertions of the magistrate with regard to that lady?" The governor shook his head, and was silent: Clifford advanced a few steps. "Let me know," he exclaimed, in an appealing tone,

“if but a moment before I die, let me know that she is in safety.”

The governor moved towards the door, but he turned once more, and gazed upon the prisoner with earnest compassion. “Nature did not intend you,” he said at length, “to die so vile a death.”

He left the cell, and William Clifford was again alone. His mind was calmer; the severe and sudden struggle had wrought a more complete victory than he at first dared to hope for, and the unexpected sympathy which the governor evinced, had inclined his heart to gentler feelings. Hope, too, had sprung up, even in the midst of gloom; he believed that the governor would inform him, before it was too late, of the safety of Mirabel, and indeed he could not bring himself to think that the regent would sacrifice that young and lovely girl. She would go to England—she would bear his last gift to Blanch Courtenay, and (if he knew her) she would clear him from every imputation of falsehood and inconstancy, even at the risk of humbling herself in the eyes of a rival.

It was a sad hope, but still it was a hope; and, in some measure consoled by these reflections, Clifford turned his thoughts to the awful fate, which, in all probability, awaited him—he strove to banish every idea of the possibility of reprieve or pardon—and, earnestly entreating forgiveness for all his errors, he cast himself in humble reliance upon the mercy of Heaven. He remained in prayer until he was reconducted to the hall, where he was met by the magistrate, who had laid aside all the pomp of his former manner, and now spoke in a low and hurried tone, while he pointed with his hand to a door guarded by two sentinels.

“Are you prepared,” he inquired, “to make a voluntary confession?”

“I have before informed you,” replied Clifford, “of my determination to be silent!”

The magistrate made a sign to the governor, who, with visible reluctance, gave the word to the sentinels to advance. At the same moment two gaolers stepped forward for the purpose of knocking off the fetters with which Clifford was bound. He stood perfectly still, as if

scarcely observing their occupation ; but it was a dreadful moment ! The magistrate led the way, and the prisoner followed between two guards, his head erect, his step firm, and the fire of his eye unquenched, even though his cheek was pale. The governor watched him to the door, and stood before it, ere he could determine to enter. Indeed, it was the dread alone of being suspected of some connivance at the schemes of the prisoner, that withheld him from absenting himself entirely.

The door was ajar—he heard the fatal preparations—he heard the last exhortation of the magistrate—and the calm, clear reply of the dauntless Clifford. He was ashamed of the emotion which he felt—he listened for every sound, for he knew their indication well, and nothing was now wanting but the signal to begin. It was given—and, at the same moment, a piercing shriek rang through the lofty hall, and echoed round the passages of the prison of Vincennes !

The governor's countenance fell, he did not expect that Clifford's resolution would have so

soon failed; but no! that shriek issued from the other side of the building—that shriek issued from the lips of a woman. A suspicion of the truth, a vague, wild hope, flashed upon his mind, he called to the executioner in a peremptory tone to suspend his operations, and, ere he could gain the opposite door, it was flung open, and Mirabel de Bernay rushed in, followed by several of the inferior officers of the place. Her appearance was that of one deprived of reason—her eye was wild and haggard—her hair hung dishevelled upon her shoulders, and she wore neither cloak nor hood, although the night was cold and wintry. Her lips moved without articulation; but, seizing the governor by one hand, she held up before his eyes a paper bearing the regent's sign and seal, and then, before he could perceive her intention, she darted past into the next room, pushing every one aside until she reached Clifford, just at the moment that his features were recovering from the convulsion which the first infliction of pain had occasioned. Regardless of those who stood around, she knelt by his side, she called

upon him by every fond and endearing name, and bade him live, for she had gained his pardon! With her own hand she strove to free him; and, as each strenuous effort failed, she redoubled her exertions, until the blood streamed from her fair hands, and the colour forced itself back into her cheeks. At first no one in the Chamber of the Question disturbed her, so utterly at a loss were they to know how she had effected her entrance, or with what authority she might be vested.

The magistrate was the first who thought proper to step forward and lay his hand upon her arm, in order to lead her gently away. She sprang up—she shook him off—she stood between him and the prisoner, whose hand she grasped, and glanced around her like the lioness, when guarding the den in which her young lie concealed. At that moment the governor entered the room, having ascertained that the document was authentic, and conversed with the two officers who had escorted Mirabel by command of the Duke of Orleans. But when Clifford was set free, and stood by Mirabel's

side, and took her hand and spoke soothingly to her, she could not yet believe that it was so. The sight of him she loved stretched upon the rack—the over-excitement of her mind during the last week—terror, exhaustion, and agony, had, in fact, produced a temporary insanity; her eye rolled, and her language was wild and incoherent. She continued to menace the bystanders with the wrath of the Duke of Orleans, if William—her William, the only being upon earth she loved, were not instantly released. The governor approached, and spoke gently to her, but she only answered him by wild reproaches for his haste and cruelty. With much difficulty Clifford at length induced her to follow the governor and the two officers into another apartment, and by degrees she became calmer, at least more rational. She understood that he was released, but for some time she watched him, as if believing he must still suffer, although he assured her that the pain he had endured was only momentary; and then she looked around, and remembered where she was and what she had said, and bursting into an

agony of tears, Mirabel hid her face between her hands. After having suffered the first torrent of such feelings to have their course, the governor addressed Clifford, congratulated him upon his pardon, and informed him that his imprisonment would not last much longer ; after which, he would be at liberty to quit France. He then requested that Clifford would use his influence with the baronne to leave the prison, as the two officers were intrusted by the regent with her escort to her own chateau, and had strict orders not to defer their return. A few words in a low tone—a hurried blessing—a gentle pressure of the hand—and Mirabel left the prison of Vincennes.

CHAPTER XVI.

TOGETHER with the full pardon, in authentic form, for Clifford, the governor had received private orders from the regent to detain the prisoner until his further pleasure should be known. Clifford was no longer subjected, indeed, to the hardships which he had undergone on the first day of his detention, but the suspense, which was prolonged from hour to hour, was tantalizing in the extreme. While he remained in Vincennes, all external communication was cut off; and, after the lapse of a fortnight, he began to suspect that the regent had repented of his clemency; but the order for his release arrived at length, and the governor, in strict obedience to the commands, allowed

him to leave the gate of the prison immediately, though it wanted not many hours to nightfall.

Clifford debated for some time in his own mind, if he should run the risk of repairing to Mirabel's chateau at once, impressed as he was with the belief that the Duke of Orleans would gain information of all his proceedings. Nevertheless, as he intended to leave France the next day, he felt that it would be impossible to do so, without taking leave of one to whom he was so deeply indebted. He took his way then in what he believed to be the direction of the baronne's chateau, though he was not much acquainted with the roads in the neighbourhood of Vincennes, and walked on rapidly, giving way to the varying sensations of his mind. The first breath of free air that played upon his brow seemed bliss to one who had looked on a fortnight's captivity as interminable. He gazed around him, and stretched forth his arms, and strode hastily over the ground, as if to convince himself of his freedom. But Clifford's sensations did not merit the name of happiness; his feelings had lately been so severely tried, and

subjected to so many vicissitudes, that they were incapable of that elasticity which had formerly characterized them. It is true that he had now the prospect of being shortly united to Blanch; but that reflection, bound as it was to a thousand memories of difficulties and dangers still to be overcome, had no power, for the moment, to relieve the depression of his spirits.

It was a cold, gray evening, not a ray of sun, which had for many days absented itself, broke through the gloom, and the wintry sound of a low moaning wind swept over the ground. There was at that moment a feeling of insufficiency in Clifford's ever active mind—an involuntary impression of the nothingness of life—a craving for something durable and lasting. His was that mood that comes over the chastened heart, more particularly at the still hour of evening, and seems like a glimpse of the soul's immortality; an indication of higher aspirations to be sought for, than those to which we have fondly looked on earth. While in this train of thought, amid the silence and gloom of a winter evening, a lark sprang sud-

denly up in Clifford's path, and tuned his glad-some notes, higher and higher, till he was lost among the clouds. Thoughtful before, this little incident rendered him doubly so, and he contrasted the lark with his fellow birds—the merry playmates of the infant year. The nightingale, whose sweet song closes with the sweet season; the blackbird, the thrush, the wood-pigeons, all have their own loved time, when the sun is warm, and the trees verdant, and their little melody is answered and echoed from branch to branch by the kindred voices of their tribe; but the lark's gladsome notes is heard at all hours—in all seasons; the wintry aspect of nature, the gloomy colouring of the sky, have no power to check the spirit of his song. His little wings are spread! his little notes are tuned! and upward he soars to the very gates of heaven! Is not the mystery of his undisturbed happiness explained by the direction which it takes?—unlike those other birds, whose joy is dependent upon surrounding objects, he chooses a higher course, he soars above the earth; and perhaps, piercing the heavy clouds which

obscure our view, finds an atmosphere of light beyond!

Such meditations as these occupied Clifford's mind as he left the prison of Vincennes behind, and quickened his pace in hopes of gaining the home of Mirabel before night had closed in. But the way was not so easily found as he at first conceived; and it soon became too dark to distinguish any object that was not close to the path he pursued. Clifford in consequence wandered, it would appear, several miles out of his way, and found no one to direct him excepting a surly peasant, who was more taken up in swearing at his horse's tardiness than in replying to the wayfarer's inquiries. He followed the scanty directions which he received from him, however, and after walking onward for some time, he fancied that he could descry the outline of a large building. Immediately after the cheering aspect of a light, at no very great distance, encouraged him to quicken his pace in that direction. At first he judged that it might proceed from the humble lattice of a cottage, but was soon undeceived by the blaze

became gradually more apparent through the trees. As he approached, the sounds of music reached his ear, borne at intervals upon the wind, now blowing directly from the quarter in which he had seen the light, and Clifford was led to believe that mass was performing in one of those small chapels, which were not unfrequent at that time, by the road-side, particularly in the neighbourhood of any large domain. His supposition was realized as he advanced, by perceiving a profusion of tapers, the light of which streamed through the window and half-open door, as also by the passing to and fro of figures, and the low chant of priests. He approached gently, and entering at the same time with some country-people, who were attracted in a similar manner, stood concealed among them, and had leisure to remark the scene. A moment's observation sufficed to explain the whole:—the little chapel, or oratory, where he now found himself, was hung with black velvet, on which were blazoned innumerable escutcheons, some surmounted by military ensigns, and others by emblems of

mortality. The altar was one blaze of light, which contrasted vividly with the sombre colouring of the walls. Priests were performing the service for the dead; and kneeling before the balustrade, clothed in the deepest mourning, with her form nearly shrouded by an ample veil, appeared a figure, in which Clifford would hardly have recognised Mirabel, had not the attendance of Armand, and the well-known coat of the De Bernays, before assisted him in the discovery.

It was the anniversary of her brother's death, a day more especially dedicated to the memory of him who was, indeed, ever and painfully remembered.

The ceremony concluded, Mirabel rose from her knees, and turning her head, looked towards the gallery under which Clifford stood; she did not see him, but he saw her!—the pallid cheek, the heavy eye, the expression of sadness round that mouth, which once appeared only formed to smile,—the look that told she was older in sorrow than in years!

The baronne's movement was followed by

the sweet tones of young and harmonious voices, that came stealing softly, and swelling gradually into the full harmony of a requiem. One voice, in particular, attracted Clifford's attention; it was not stronger, it was not louder than the rest, but it came from the depths of Mirabel's heart, and could not, therefore, fall unheeded upon William's ear. He had never heard her sing before, but those tones were such as might well vibrate in his ear, unforgotten, through life. The words were well suited to the music, for both were sad, and yet at times there was a burst of melancholy triumph, that accorded perfectly with the subject: both seemed the composition of one, whose heart was too full to measure its outpourings; the metre of the verse was frequently changed, and the music occasionally assumed a wild character, perhaps not very dissimilar from the mood in which it was imagined.

It was, in fact, a lament for the death of a young soldier, who had closed his brief career ere the record of his transient fame was inscribed upon the roll of chivalry;—one who died in the pride

of youth, in the beauty of innocence;—one, who had only enjoyed the morning of life, and was never doomed to watch the coming on of night. His maiden sword had wrought wonders on the field—his charger had been foremost in the encounter—and, when pierced by a thousand wounds, which his valour had provoked, he lay bleeding on the ground—the eye, that was almost glazed, still followed the banner of his country—the heart that was weltering in its gore, still beat with the pulse of patriotism—and the voice, that was faltering from agony, still echoed the shout of victory, or rallied the comrades who trampled upon him as they advanced. Brief, but glorious career! He had only known the joys of earth, and had now exchanged them for those of heaven. Disappointment and sorrow had been unknown to him; his life was a short, but stainless page!

The melody died away in the same gradual manner it had commenced; the priests had already left the altar, the choir had disappeared, and the lights were being extinguished, when Clifford, fearful of exposing Mirabel to any

additional emotion at such a moment, left the chapel, and stood concealed under the shadow of the building, until he saw Armand come out to summon the baronne's carriage. The boy understood him at a word, and making the matter known to Mirabel, received her orders to remain for the purpose of conducting William, on foot, to her chateau. She looked to the spot where he stood, but she did not speak; and Clifford could hear a deep sigh as she entered the carriage. He followed immediately, and many were the questions concerning his mistress, that Clifford asked of the faithful boy, as they hurried on. On the whole, his account was satisfactory: since her last visit to Vincennes she had been calm, Armand said, and although any one who loved her might detect a great change in her appearance, she had never complained of being ill, nor had she, indeed, seemed to be so.

Mirabel preceded them only by a few moments, and she was ascending the staircase, when William and the page joined her. She bade them both follow, and led the way into

a small room, where she usually passed the morning, and where they would be free from all intrusion. She did not speak for some minutes, and the contrast of her manner with what it formerly had been, was so striking as to remind Clifford forcibly of the sketch which Stanley had originally given him of the waywardness of her character. She seated herself at length, and in a voice that betrayed more of what was passing within than the words which she uttered, said,

“It would not be expedient either for your sake or my own, that you should remain any time under my roof; although you well know the pleasure it must ever afford me——.” She could not pursue the constrained style which she had chosen, and added, more in her usual manner, but yet with evident restraint,

“Were the regent to discover that we had again met, his anger might lead him to cancel the favour which he reluctantly granted. You must not be found upon the shores of France after to-morrow: I have provided for your departure by the best means in my power, though

latterly, as you may believe, there has been little time or opportunity for arrangement of any kind. Armand will conduct you to the house of one of my tenants, where you may pass the night in perfect ease and security ; and in the morning he will be your guide to the coast, where the same vessel now lies in which he, for whom we both have risked so much, crossed the Channel. Do not think all these precautions unnecessary ; acquainted, as I am, with the character of the Duke of Orleans, my advice is that you should intrude yourself as little as possible upon his notice, and that the next thing he hears concerning you should be your safe arrival in England."

There was something so foreign in her tone and manner from the usual current of her feelings, that it inspired Clifford with a sensation of profound melancholy.

"When I turned my steps," he said, "in the direction of your chateau, I felt that were it known, I might compromise your safety as well as my own ; but you must forgive me, the idea of leaving France without bidding you

farewell—you to whom I owe every thing—I could not do it, and you, Mirabel, you would not have wished it?”

“Alas, no!” she replied, in her own sweet voice, for those few words had banished all her assumed indifference, “Heaven knows what a wretched and weary time I have passed since that dreadful night at Vincennes! I was not informed of the day you were to be set at liberty, and did not dare to ask; sometimes I believed you were gone, and sometimes I tried to wish you were—but that was impossible. Oh, no! William, I bless you for this; it will be something to remember when you are away. This room,” she added, in a low tone, as if speaking to herself, “this room will be hallowed to me now.”

Again she checked herself, and bade Armand hastily bring some refreshments, and make every preparation for immediate departure.

They sat opposite each other for several moments, in perfect silence; the silence of the lips alone, for well did they know all that was passing in the other's mind. What a host of

feelings were concentrated in the short interval that elapsed during the absence of Armand ! What a contrast did the outward demeanour of those two companions present to the perturbed state of their hearts !

They never raised their eyes, or stirred from one position, until William, feeling that every moment rendered the silence more distressing, rose, and taking the baronne's hand, lifted it tenderly, but respectfully, to his lips.

"Mirabel," he said, "we are about to part, will you not assure me of your forgiveness before we do so ? Sorrow and danger have I brought upon you, who, in return, have given me life, liberty, and —— !"

He was about to add, happiness, but the word seemed ill-placed at such a moment.

"Mirabel, you do not answer me ; you turn away your head ; am I then lowered in your estimation ?"

"William," she replied, "do not, for mercy's sake, speak to me in this manner ! I had fancied—I had believed—I could have stood this trial better. Do not prolong it—leave me

soon; I shall not have the power to tell you when.—Good God! to think that we shall never, never meet again!”

She passed her hand over her eyes, but recovered herself upon the entrance of Armand, and urged Clifford to take some refreshment, while she gave a few additional orders to her faithful page. She charged him with a message to the master of the vessel, and desired that his brother, the boy who had accompanied Dumont, should go with them to England, in order to keep him out of the way a little longer.

The baronne then relapsed into silence, and there was another pause more painful than the first. The page whispered a few words to Clifford, who once more rose, and pressed the hand of Mirabel. They did not speak. William quitted the room first; Armand lingered for one moment to receive some final order,—and then Mirabel de Bernay was alone!

CHAPTER XVII.

IN order to prosecute our narrative, which is drawing speedily to a close, we must transport our reader to a small village on the coast of England.

It was at an early hour in the morning that a stranger appeared on the beach, and made many inquiries relative to a small vessel that was riding at anchor, as near the shore as she could approach with safety. The inhabitants of the village, consisting of some dozen fishermen, and their families, gathered eagerly round the stranger to give him all the information, perhaps more than he required. The vessel was pitching and tossing with the equinoctial gales, howling round her shrouds, in a terrific manner.

“She’s a French craft,” said one man, “by her rig; but from what part of the coast I can’t say, for it’s easy to see she’s a stranger to our waters.”

“There’s more captains than one aboard,” exclaimed another, “if my glass tells truth; there’s a young man that walks up and down deck, and points first to the shore and then to the boat, as if there was a possibility of her living in such a sea as this!”

“He’ll have his way in the end,” observed a third; “I’ve a notion he’s somebody of consequence, with his page there beside him, and another forward, that wears the same livery.”

“If it’s him that I take him for,” said a woman, who had contented herself with looking intelligent for some time past, “it’s no wonder that he wishes to land and be off again before it’s known.”

“You talk nonsense, wife,” exclaimed the first speaker; “you can’t suppose the chevalier would run his head into the fire again so soon for nothing; why there a’nt a handful of men aboard.”

“I mentioned no names,” replied the woman, “but whoever or whatever he may be, he’s some strange wish for coming ashore immediately, and that I know as well as if I could hear him say so.”

During the preceding conversation, the stranger, who is better known to us by the name of Dumont, stood with his arms folded, and his eye fixed upon the ship, with an expression of intense anxiety. No sooner had the woman concluded her speech, than he turned suddenly round, and proposed to her husband to take him alongside the vessel.

The man looked not a little surprised, and refused in the most decided manner; but Dumont continued:

“When I first came down upon the beach my good friend,” he said, “you were descanting upon the merits and exploits of your own boat, and even my inexperienced eye can discern that she is far stronger, and better constructed, than the one belonging to the ship, which they appear to me to be in the act of lowering at this moment. I have no doubt we shall reach

the vessel, and return in perfect safety, and you shall name your own sum for doing so. There are those on board who are very dear to me; and one word from my lips would deter that young man (of whom you spoke just now) from exposing himself to unnecessary danger."

"And there are those on shore," replied the fisherman, looking down at his young wife, who had stolen round from the other side, and now clung closely to his arm, "there are those on shore, d'ye see, sir, that I may say are dear to me. I've known the day when you shouldn't have asked me twice: but things are different now. It's my belief that such a sea as this would swamp any boat—but they're determined to try it however."

As he spoke, all eyes were again turned towards the sea, for there could no longer exist a doubt of the determination which the people on board the vessel had come to. Three passengers were seen descending the ship's side, while only two sailors followed their example, and that with apparent reluctance. They had gained nothing by the delay, for at this moment

the storm raged with increased fury ; the breakers were fearfully high, and the dark and threatening clouds appeared to frown upon so rash an undertaking. The group on the beach became doubly anxious ; Dumont advanced closer to the sea-side, and the fisherman whispered a few words in his wife's ear.

“ I hope not,” she said, “ I hope there'll be no necessity. I've watched you home in as bad a storm as this ; but I'm sorry from my heart for that gentleman, for I know what his feelings must be.”

They were again silent, as they watched the little skiff, which struggled gallantly for some time, now rising on the crest of a tremendous wave, now hid in the hollow ; one moment thrown forward with such violence as nearly to reach the shore, the next carried back again by the sweeping retrograde motion, even further than before. At length it appeared as if a hundred waves had contributed to swell the liquid mountain, which rolled towards the boat, and with a low murmuring sound, seemed to menace her with more than usual fury. It was

a breathless moment, many a stern and even weatherbeaten countenance betrayed signs of real alarm, as their experience enabled them to calculate to a nicety the risk which the French boat ran. She was hid to their view for a longer time than before, and, on reappearing, their worst fears were realized, for her keel was uppermost ! The sailors were seen struggling back towards the vessel, which they regained in safety ; the young man, who had been the subject of so much conversation, was swimming strongly for the shore, evidently making strong efforts to support one of his companions, whose exertions appeared most feeble, and who slipped from his grasp, and sunk, when within fifty yards of the shore.

Dumont had instantly leaped into one of the boats, which lay upon the water's edge, and the fisherman, extricating himself with some difficulty from his wife's grasp, hastened to join him. By this time another boat had put off, and quickly succeeded in rescuing one of the pages, but, unfortunately, in so doing, she struck the

head of the other, who, with uplifted hands, was just rising to the surface. The next boat, in which was Dumont, followed so swiftly, as to enable him to catch a glimpse of, and to grasp, the sufferer's form. He lifted it into the boat, and regained the shore in safety, where by this time stood, in security, the two other passengers who had so narrowly escaped death, a fate which appeared to have befallen their companion, who lay pale and motionless in the arms of the Frenchman.

The people gathered round Dumont with mingled curiosity and compassion, but he motioned them aside with a look of stern authority, and addressing the young man, by the name of Clifford, bade him follow quickly. Bending over his senseless burden, with his hand placed upon the left side, to discover if the heart still beat, Dumont made but few strides between the sea-side and the cottage of the fisherman's wife, where he gently deposited his precious charge upon her homely bed. William Clifford and the boy, Armand, stood beside him, with

several of the people who had followed, and now gazed in speechless apprehension upon a sight at once strange and beautiful.

The sufferer was clad in a garb resembling that of the other page, though of more costly materials; but the delicacy of the complexion, the diminutive size of the limbs, and the long black hair, now dripping with salt water, which hung in wild profusion; the hat under which it had been concealed having fallen off in the sea—all seemed at variance with the masculine attire.

William Clifford leaned over the pillow, and gazed upon the lovely, though inanimate form with feelings of bitter grief.

“I had long suspected this,” he said, “but did not dare believe it. O God! she is dying, Dumont; will no one tell me how to save her!”

He took her hand, he chafed it between his own; while the woman, who well knew how to act in such an emergency, assisted him, and they at length succeeded in restoring animation. A slight shudder gave evidence that life was not extinct; and after a painful struggle, Mira-

bel De Bernay opened her eyes, with a bewildered gaze, and alarmed at the number of unfamiliar faces which she beheld, closed them again.

Dumont and Clifford made signs to the people to retire, which they did with some reluctance, only leaving the mistress of the house with the strangers. Armand kneeled by the bedside, took Mirabel's hand gently, and, as he did so she again opened her eyes, but scarcely appeared to recognise him. She moved her lips several times without uttering any distinct sound. When she succeeded, her voice was earnest though feeble.

"William—" she said, "I do not see—tell me, for God's sake, where is he?"

"Here," he replied, at the same time removing the long wet hair from her face and forehead; "I am here, close to you; there is no one lost; and you, Mirabel, you are recovering now!"

"Oh, no!" she replied, faintly, "I shall never recover. I did not mean, William, that you should know me, and for that reason I avoided speaking to you, or approaching you,

during our passage. It was an idle wish, but I had set my heart on seeing *her*; and I believed I might do so without being discovered."

"Pray do not speak any more at present," exclaimed William, alarmed at the feeble sound of her voice; "indeed, Mirabel, warmth and quiet may yet restore you."

"Oh, no!" she said, "I have too much pain here."

She raised her hand to her head, and to Clifford's horror, he saw that her fingers were covered with blood.

The woman now interfered, entreating that they would go and call some one who was capable of examining the wound; and allow her in the mean time, to get the poor thing to bed.

Mirabel looked earnestly at William. "I beg of you," she said, "I would insist if I had strength to do so, that you will call no one,—that you will not leave me. It will all be over soon; and why should my latest moments be disturbed for no use. It would only hurry the

moment that is fast approaching, and render it doubly bitter. Listen to me, William, for I am dying, and I once said I should love to die thus—and you, too, Armand, my good, my faithful Armand, listen to one who will never make you another request, or cost you another pang.”

As she spoke, Dumont moved slowly to the foot of the bed, and the poor woman, gazed upon them all with tears in her eyes, though she understood not the language in which they spoke. Mirabel continued,

“Come nearer, William—both of you—for it is an exertion to speak. I promised the regent that I would await his summons for Mademoiselle de Valois’s marriage at my chateau, in Normandy. I must be conveyed there, Armand. When his highness sends for me—you will show them where I lie—in Gaspard’s monument. Stay, one more request—let my brother’s sword be buried in my coffin, Armand, and the scarf that hangs beside it. That is the only thing I possess, which once belonged to you, William. Oh ! my God, I am dying—I am at peace with all, but my thoughts are too much set on earthly

things!—Armand, restrain your tears—the grief of Gaspard’s brother should be more manly. William, let that poor boy live with you for a few years,—until he be more fitted to struggle with the trials and sorrows of the world. He will be no burden to any one: at Vincennes I have left my will—the chateau there I bequeath to Armand, with the care of my poor Sable—my poor, faithful dog. The rest of my property is left to Blanch Courtenay. How faint my heart grows!—I felt I should never return to France.”

Clifford was deeply afflicted;—“Oh! Mirabel,” he said, taking her hand within his own, “would to God that the forfeit of my life could save yours. It was your gift—and, oh! how willingly would I now relinquish it.”

“Do not say so,” she replied, “for your life is dear to others beside yourself” — she sighed deeply. “Tell me,” she continued, in a rambling manner, “was it a dream, William, or did I see the prisoner from Vincennes?”

Clifford made a sign to Dumont, who advanced to Mirabel’s side. She looked at him

as if a thousand associations had been awakened by his presence.

“I can sympathize with you now,” she said, “though you told me that I could not when last we met. In a few moments, my spirit will obtain its freedom,—for this world has been little else than a prison-house to me!”

Dumont strove to speak, but he could not,—a single tear, the first, the last—he was ever to shed, trembled in his eye; and he who had encountered danger and captivity, with stern composure, stood unnerved by the deathbed of a woman.

Mirabel smiled sweetly on him, and then she turned once more to Clifford.

“I am dying, William,” she said, “oh! do not look at me thus, lest you make life too dear, and trouble my thoughts, that should be fixed on high. In this moment of separation, my heart overflows with tenderness for all mankind, and with forgiveness for those who have ever sought to injure me;—I bless the regent, whose mercy spared your life,—and you, my faithful, my afflicted Armand—and her you

love, William, who will perhaps shed a tear on Mirabel's tomb, when she hears what I have been to you. William, dearest—best beloved—our creeds are not the same, but true piety has a common language; let me hear some words of solace, in that voice which will soon be hushed for me.”

William complied, in a low and murmuring tone: he spoke of future happiness; of eternal rewards; of the possibility of reunion, in a world that knows no change.

Her full bright eye once more beamed with enthusiasm. Taking Armand's hand, and pressing that of Clifford to her heart, while she raised a glance upon Dumont that appeared to claim his sympathy also, “Why should I grieve?” she said; “my life has not been sinful, and my heart has been awakened. I die in humble, earnest hope of that happiness which Gaspard now enjoys. A brother must be a sweet welcomer at the gates of heaven. Farewell! God bless you both—God bless you all!”

For several moments her eyes rested on

William :—“ Raise my head,” she murmured at length, “ for my breath is failing !”

She leaned her head upon his shoulder, and William in that last hour pressed his lips to her cold and deathlike forehead. A smile that seemed to partake of beatitude stole over her features.

In another moment, a loud and piercing cry from the boy Armand brought the inmates of the cottage to their side, and told them that another immortal spirit had taken flight to that world “ where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE vicissitude of feeling to which Blanch had lately been subjected,—the shame which her parents' conduct had excited,—and the fluctuating state of hope and fear, in which the uncertainty of William's safety placed her, preyed upon her health, and alarmed Lady Courtenay for that life, which she had not scrupled to render miserable. When she sat by her daughter's bedside, and watched the rapid progress of fever, and listened in horror to the first incoherent murmurs that announced the coming on of delirium, then the remorse which her husband's reasoning had silenced, took entire possession of her mind. Calling Sir Philip to witness the melancholy state of their daugh-

ter, they exchanged many a glance of terror, many an exclamation of repentance, as they deduced from her wild ravings that the treatment she had received was the cause of her dangerous illness. There were allusions to prison, and to Dumont, which were incomprehensible to Sir Philip; but when he heard the entreaties which Blanch addressed in the height of her fever to Lord Dalmaine, to forgive the unworthy deceptions her father had exercised on both; when he listened with painful eagerness to the gentle condemnations of his own child, coupled with excuses and apologies for his conduct, then the guilty man trembled; for he knew that his hypocrisy and falsehood had been discovered.

During her illness Lord Dalmaine displayed much tender interest in her recovery, while he generously laboured for her happiness in the event of her restoration to health. To Sir Philip, however, his demeanour was cold and haughty in the extreme; while, on the other hand, the confusion of the baronet's manner bespoke that humiliation which the discovery

of his duplicity naturally produced, and of which Dalmaine at length thought fit to take advantage, by demanding his consent to Blanch's union with her former lover. This proposal was immediately agreed to, when coupled with the implied threat of informing the king of the other affair in case of denial, and Sir Philip was obliged to give his unwilling consent, without being made aware of those circumstances which would have removed every scruple from his worldly mind.

Care and kindness, with the increasing mildness of the weather, worked favourably together for the recovery of Blanch; but it was some time before she was permitted to receive the visits of any one, or to breathe the open air. One of her first wishes was to see Dalmaine; but, ignorant of all that had passed during her illness, she did not think proper to make the request herself. The alteration of her parents' demeanour, and that of her father in particular, struck her most forcibly. He seemed a different person in language and manner; but this might perhaps be accounted

for by the anxiety which her danger had caused.

Lady Courtenay never left her daughter's side. The recollection that she had been on the verge of the grave endeared Blanch a hundred fold, and no influence could now have persuaded her to one act, even of passive unkindness. She shaped her conversation according to her idea of Blanch's taste, carrying her back to the days of her childhood, and the description of their early home. But when her daughter was pronounced convalescent, and the physicians suggested that in a few days the air would strengthen and refresh her, then Lady Courtenay had much to say, and the contents of many letters to read aloud.

"Here is one, dearest Blanch," she said, smiling, "that will amuse as well as interest you. It is from your aunt, Mrs. Roland Stanley. I should like you to hear the enthusiastic expression of her happiness, in having at last found a person exactly suited to her in every possible way, excepting, as Philip observes, in money and in years, both of which your aunt

possesses in greater quantities ! As far as I can judge, I think she has done wisely."

"It is singular," replied Blanch, smiling, as her mother concluded the *ci-devant* Madame D'Aubry's letter. "Nothing could be more likely, and yet the possibility of such an event never entered my head."

"I hear, also," continued Lady Courtenay, "a fact that none of us discovered when he was here, that Mr. Stanley is a furious Jacobite ; and though your aunt wisely refrains from mentioning the circumstance, her sudden conversion to the Stuart cause I am told is most remarkable. Nay, my informer assures me, that she lives in an atmosphere of white roses. You must write to her, dear child, in a few days, when you are stronger. His majesty has been most gracious in his inquiries respecting you—indeed, all your friends have evinced much anxiety. The court has lately been unusually gay, and all the ladies, including Miss Bellenden, are losing their hearts to a handsome young nobleman, who has just returned from his travels. Lord Dalmaine and

he are inseparable; and, I am told, he boasts of being an old acquaintance of yours. I have not often seen him, but your father tells me that Lord Raby inquires most tenderly after our dear Blanch."

"Lord Raby," echoed her daughter, listlessly, "I never heard the name before."

"Possibly he may have succeeded to the title since you met," replied Lady Courtenay, with a smile, and the subject was changed, by the entrance of Sir Philip.

* * * * *

During the chances and changes which befel the actors in our little narrative, since first the curtain was raised upon their proceedings, the great machinery of nature had rolled on, according to that wise course which Almighty Wisdom has prescribed. The storm raged, the sweet rain fell, the flowers sprang to life and again faded before the blast of autumn, or the snows of winter, and all without relation to the joys or sorrows of men.

When first we became acquainted with the fair girl whose danger we have just recorded, it

was then in the childhood of the year, and that year had proceeded in its course, like many a lovely but hapless daughter of clay, in lands where our religion exists under another form. Bursting into life and beauty, her early path strewn with the blossoms of hope and promise, she goes forward rejoicing;—the summer comes, her mental and personal charms are more matured, she appears at the summit of earthly prosperity. But, lo! the autumn of disappointment is at hand, and the gradual decay of every surrounding joy, induces her to relinquish a world that has already lost its charms. Then she assumes her most gorgeous robes, and decks herself in the choicest ornaments, to appear, for the last time, resplendent with beauty, in such a variegated dress as the autumnal tints present to our view, previous to being shrouded in the vestal snows of her winter veil! Such had been the fate of that year, with some of whose events we have been occupied; and, now the same part was to be enacted by its successor.

Several months had already elapsed, and the merry spring-tide had early commenced its

pleasant reign. It was a warm, bright, sunny morning when Blanch mounted her horse and rode slowly in the direction of the Home Park, by her father's side. The king, and the whole of the court had set forward at an early hour, to enjoy the diversion of a stag hunt; and Sir Philip proposed to his daughter, to join the royal party a short time before their return, a plan to which she gladly acceded. The hope of learning something conclusive from Dalmaine, was predominant in her mind, and, although during the interval of her illness, many distressing events might have occurred, Blanch felt a buoyancy of spirits for which she could scarcely account. Perhaps it was the natural consequence of her recovery, or the smiling face of nature that welcomed her as a friend; perhaps the melody of the birds who were trying their songs of love and joy; or the jocund voice of the cuckoo, the herald of her favourite season.

They proceeded through the gardens, which were now assuming their variegated dress, while the butterfly had already commenced his giddy

sportive round, frequently blending his own brilliant hues with those of the flower on which he settled, and, before the eye had detected the deception, starting forth again upon the wing, as if in mockery of the eye he had cheated. The monotonous hum of the bee might be heard pursuing the same track with diligence and success, as diving deeper into the heart of the flower than his heedless and superficial forerunner, he extracted that sweetness which had escaped the notice of him who was content to play upon the surface. The clustering lilac mingled its blossoms with the golden shower of the laburnum in graceful fellowship, like twin children of the early spring, while the chestnut avenues were studded with their flowery cones, and the faint, though not insipid perfume of the hawthorn was borne far and wide by the breath of morning. Hope unfurled her verdant banner; every tree and shrub were decked in her own livery; and even that dark and gloomy tree which is so often coupled with the thought of death, and sorrow, put forth

shoots of tender green, as if emulating the brightness around, and offering an image of that holy solace which is sometimes permitted to spring up in the heart of man, even in the midst of earthly despair.

The riders crossed the little rustic bridge, and entered the park, while the canal by which it is divided into two portions glittered like a sheet of liquid fire. Here and there were groups of startled deer, elevating their graceful heads to guard against surprise, and bounding off in terror at every movement of their own companions.

As Blanch entered the gate, a considerable herd, that had taken shelter under the avenue, alarmed by her sudden appearance, plunged into the stream, and swam rapidly to the other side, disturbing the still waters, and dashing them in golden ripples on the shore.

“I can see them,” said Sir Philip; “I can recognise his majesty from this distance; put your horse into a canter, Blanch, and we shall be up with them in a moment.”

She did so, and galloping across the turf, they reached the spot at the very moment the stag was brought to the ground by two dogs.

It was a gay sight, for the huntsmen wore their gorgeous liveries, and the courtiers and ladies, well mounted and magnificently dressed, were disposed in a group round the royal person, and at this moment every head, save that of George the First, was uncovered.

Sir Philip rode up, followed by Blanch, whom the king congratulated upon her recovery, as did every one present, in heartfelt terms. But she could not speak; she could not thank them; and even his majesty's gracious reception only elicited a silent inclination of the head,—for by the side of Lord Dalmaine, with his eye fixed upon her, rode William Clifford!

He was clothed in deep mourning, and was followed by a boy in the garb of a page, whose melancholy countenance, and sable dress, formed a sad contrast to the smiling faces and gay attire by which he was surrounded.

“We have forgot, Sir Philip,” exclaimed his

majesty, with a smile of intelligence, and in the best English he could command, "your daughter is not acquainted with our newly-gained and faithful subject, the Earl of Raby!"

Blanch looked at the speaker in joyful astonishment, and perceived by his countenance, and that of all present, that the understanding was general.

The generous hearted Dalmaine, to whose exertions Clifford's success was owing, looked on with a mingled sensation of pleasure and of sorrow. He watched the look of silent ecstasy, and while glorying in the thought that he had proved instrumental in restoring Blanch to happiness, he averted his head, lest he should again witness a glance which had never, which could never now, be bent on him.

In another moment William was at her side—in another moment her eye rested upon that form on which memory had so long dwelt, and her ear imbibed the music of that voice for which she had so long listened.

The rapture of that moment could only be conveyed to the imagination by the silence

which they maintained. There are no words for the fulness of joy : the torrent that is dashed from rock to rock with a thousand obstacles to impede its progress, a thousand hinderances to resist and thwart its natural tendency, presents us with a more fruitful imagery than the calm and tranquil lake, on whose bosom is reflected with faithful similarity, the blessed colouring of heaven, and the calm beauty of nature in repose.

“My dear Blanch !” exclaimed Miss Bellen-den, archly, as she rode up by her side a few moments before they reached the palace, “when I next write to Paris, what message shall I deliver to my cousin ?”

“Tell him, dear Mary,” replied her friend, placing her hand as she spoke within Clifford’s, “tell him merely these words—‘*Qui bien aime, tard oublie !*’”

CONCLUSION.

THOSE who visited Normandy in the year 1721, speak in enthusiastic admiration of a masterwork of art, adorning the chapel of an ancient chateau in that province. It is a monument from the chisel of Roubilliac, consisting of a male and female figure, of singular beauty, whose features bear a striking resemblance.

The larger figure is represented as a guardian angel, who, by the skill of the sculptor, is made to appear actually hovering in the air, while he receives in his arms the almost senseless form of a lovely young woman.

She is apparently rising from the sea; and her clinging garments, and long dishevelled

hair, seem heavy and dripping with the element that overwhelmed her.

There is a glance of recognition in both countenances; but bearing a different character, in the sublimer expression of the spirit, and the languid eye of the dying.

The tablet below bears the following inscription :

THIS MONUMENT
was erected by
WILLIAM EARL OF RABY,
and
BLANCH HIS WIFE,
to the Memory
of
A BROTHER AND SISTER,
the last hereditary possessors
of this Castle,
and the last representatives of a line
of Noble Ancestry.

It was said by one of old,
“ The sweetest flowers are fittest for
the bosom of God.”

At the time of which we are speaking, the castle was inhabited by a man of retired and eccentric habits, who was supposed to have once mixed in the world of war and politics,

but was now devoted to a life of comparative seclusion. It was whispered that he did not care to show himself at Paris during the regent's lifetime, while others positively affirmed, that the Duke of Orleans desired nothing better than the prosperity of a man who had once been his friend.

The English owners of the castle occasionally visited their Norman possessions, and many a thought of by-gone years was awakened by the sight of that tomb. Nor could the jealous Armand fail to confess, that Lady Raby's patience was never wearied by his fond reminiscences, or her sympathy denied to his passionate regret for the death of Mirabel de Bernay.

FINIS.

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